



WP2 Research Summary

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A. Aim of the project report

“Another central role of the (VET) process is the development of common European frameworks and tools, aimed at enhancing transparency and quality of competences and qualifications, and facilitating mobility of learners and workers. The process paves the way towards a European labour market, and a European VET area complementary to the European area for higher education”. (Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in VET, 5 December 2006)

Alongside these general political reasons, there are also strong economic reasons, after this long and severe downturn, to foster the European VET homogenisation. Unemployment is rising across Europe and in some countries it is far beyond two digits. In addition, employers' budgets have become tighter and training can be seen by small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as expendable costs. On the contrary, projects like Network QA will contribute towards helping the labour market to trust in QA frameworks for training within a European dimension.

Our project “Networking for Quality Assurance” -NQA-, funded by the Leonardo da Vinci section of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), has a partnership of six countries: Finland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain and United Kingdom. Of course we are aware that there are many differences among national VET systems; one of the aims of this research is to identify and to compare these differences. However, the main aim of this Partnership is to research and gain an understanding of Quality Assurance frameworks operating across the EU, while also bringing together some best practice models and approaches, and to formulate using an interagency approach in the VET sector. We hope to provide some useful suggestions for National and EU decision makers and VET stakeholders.

B. The VET system in the six Countries

We can say that the education and training systems are more or less similar across the EU countries involved in this project; the main institutions involved, in the various countries are: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour/Employment, their Agencies or VET Centres and the territorial bodies; the system is generally articulated into:

- Pre-primary school non-compulsory;
- First cycle of education (8 years, compulsory and free);
- Second cycle of education, including Upper Secondary school and Vocational Education and Training (3-5 years, in part compulsory and free);
- University education (3-6 years, not-compulsory) and Post-university studies (different duration, not-compulsory).

The compulsory school period lasts 8-11 years (with some difference in the starting year). After this each student is free to choose his/her education path: to finish the second cycle (or not) and then to go to third level (or not). She/he may also choose to start working. The VET system is an important opportunity for young citizens to

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improve their skills and competence after the compulsory school period, in order to enter the labour market with higher chances of employment.

C. The QA system in the VET sector

Here is a short summary of the organisation of QA systems in the six countries.

In **Spain** the whole initial VET QA subsystem is carried out through the Educational Evaluation National Institute (*INEE*). The Ministry of Education establishes overall programmes and some contents, but the management and implementation has been transferred to the Education Offices of the Autonomous Communities. In 2011 the Public Employment Service (PES), in cooperation with the regional offices and the Tripartite Foundation, set out for the Employment Systems, a minimum content for information to be included in questionnaires which evaluate the quality of training courses.

In **Finland** the Quality Management Recommendation for VET has been adopted by the Ministry of Education to support and encourage VET providers to pursue excellence when improving the quality of their operations. This guideline document is based on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF). The aim is that by 2015 VET providers will have effective quality systems and the system of VET financing will support VET providers in achieving the aims set for the QA.

In **Ireland** The Department of Education and Skills, through 16 Education and Training Boards, is responsible for this sector. QA in this sector is the responsibility of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) which was established in 2012 bringing together the former QA institutions (FETAC, HETAC, NQAI and IUQB). QQI is now responsible for awarding quality assurance along with validating programmes; it will implement integrated policies on provider registration across further and higher education and training.

In **Italy** the QA system in the public schools is entrusted, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, University and Research to the National Evaluation System based on the cooperation of three National institutions. In the private sector, there is a lot of autonomy and some schools are certificated following ISO and EFQM models, some are organized in voluntary networks. If the private schools want to receive public funding, they must get regional accreditation which is the main tool for quality assurance of VET at regional levels.

In **Romania** there are National Agencies to support VET development, one centre (NCTVETD) to develop a National QA Framework and several QA agencies to monitor both public and private training institutions. There are five priorities for the VET system: 1) build a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for vocational education and training; 2) decentralize the management of the system; 3) increase financial resources through a participatory financing system; 4) develop an information system to supply the VET demand at national, regional and local level; 5) base the training system on vocational standards as benchmarks for quality.

In **the UK** education is one of the areas where power is devolved to local governments. In particular, in **Northern Ireland** the Department for Employment

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and Learning (DEL) provides funding and support for the public VET system and, in part, for the private one. The quality improvement strategy is based on the document "Success through Excellence" ('07). A public Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for the inspecting and reporting on the quality of delivery and teaching in the VET system. Within ESF projects, DEL is currently exploring EFQM as a framework for quality assurance.

D. Policy trends for QA system in the VET sector

Also, acceptance of the EU recommendations and guidelines across the six countries has progressed at varying rates. The following is an synthesis of the main approved policies and their implementation.

In **Spain** the Ministry of Education launched (2010) a National Quality Plan, after which in July 2011 the Spanish reference framework for ensuring quality in VET systems and the Spanish Net for Quality Assurance in VET systems were legally established. Some of the indicators included in the Plan are directly connected to the European indicators included in the EQAVET framework. The regional evaluation units are already employing the quality assurance cycle recommended by the EQARF. Their effort is focused on the compatibility of the EQARF indicators and guidelines and the different models already used in each region.

In **Finland** the guide lines are based on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (COAF); in 2011 the Ministry started the implementation of EQAVET with a target of implementing the framework fully by 2015. The system of VET financing will support VET providers in achieving the aims set for the quality. In addition, quality improvement tools and support will be developed for VET providers at different stages of quality management. The QALLL results will also be considered.

In **Ireland** QA in VET is maintained through the award qualification system for education providers. All providers of VET must become a quality assured centre to deliver a recognized training offer. Almost all the 10 indicators recommended by EQAVET are considered in the Irish QA system it. The QALLL recommendations are also informing further development in the area.

In **Italy** the National Plan for quality assurance of VET Systems, according to the European Recommendation 18 June 2009, was formally adopted in April 2012 by the relevant authorities (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Regions). A EQAVET Reference point at national level was established. According to the agreement between State and Regions, any qualification issued from 2014 will have the equivalent EQF level. The Italian Isfol is one of the 14 partners in QALLL and is supporting a wider diffusion of the QALLL results.

The **Romanian** strategy for QA in VET has incorporated European philosophy in this field, and includes the conversion/adaptation of EQARF indicators into the Romanian VET environment; all indicators used at national level are related to the ten indicators proposed in the EQARF recommendations. EQAVET acceptance is improved by emphasis on the benefits offered to organisations implementing the QA framework.

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In **Northern Ireland (UK)** the ETI focuses on self-assessment and self-improvement and, within the key indicators, includes the pattern of enrolments and achievements as they are strategic for the economy. There are new activities to improve the use of EQAVET both at National and local level; the NI partner will use it within the activities of an on-going project CO-MENT (Collaborative Mentoring) with 16 partners and 90 young people supported.

E. Bottom-up best practices in the QA system

Some interesting examples are briefly outlined below.

In **Spain** an inter-administrative working group was established in 2010, led by the PES and included 14 regional employment offices and also public administration, workers and employers representatives.

In **Finland** each provider is free to decide on a QA system independently, within the requirements of a general framework; *Feedback and procedures for change* usually form part of a systematic and goal-oriented QA process.

In **Ireland** some organisations with national importance in the framework of VET feed information from service users and practitioners through their organisations, in an attempt to inform policy development. In the Irish QA model, learners provide feedback to the VET provider through one to one meetings, learner reviews, questionnaires, etc.

In **Italy** there are both approaches; the bottom-up mainly includes Peer review in the Education system performed by external experts (as "critical friend") to assess quality of training bodies and school institutions and Peer Learning among different Countries confronting the different best practices in VET quality.

In **Romania** the tradition is to use a top-down approach in designing and implementing any organisational system. There are few cases where an organisation (governmental, private or NGO) took the burden of proposing a methodology of implementation of an organisational system.

A number of VET providers in **Northern Ireland (UK)** have achieved the matrix quality standard for learning and work; it is made up of four elements: a) Leadership and Management, b) Resources, c) Service Delivery and d) Continuous Quality Improvement.

F. Interagency processes and innovative mechanisms in QA system

There are few examples and general comments on this topic; hereafter is a short list.

In **Spain** the plan for QA in VET includes the building up of the national working group (already mentioned) and the consultation with a commission integrated by the Public Administration and social interlocutors (employers and workers representatives), since

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they are also had input in the delivery of the learning cycles within the different professional groups.

In **Finland** the training providers are aware that linkage with the world of work and effective partnerships are the prerequisites of high quality vocational education and training; first interagency groups are now starting. Customers (such as students, enterprises and other workplaces, funding bodies and society) are often required, within "Customers focus", to judge the quality and the impacts of the training.

In **Ireland** there are interagency processes in place to bring organisations together mainly when a specific need is identified. One of these was developed by the Irish partner and forms the basis of the NOA Project. It was "EQUAL Youth" whose aim was to bring together the main stakeholders in the provision of services to young early school leavers in two areas in Ireland.

In **Italy** a Memorandum of Understanding on ECVET was signed in Rome in March 2013. It was developed from a network and the results of a national Project, after testing ECVET related to EQF and other European systems. Thanks to the project "National Peer Review network "(ISFOL 2012/2013), it started an effective network and a highly qualified "Community of Practice".

In **Romania** the National Group for Quality Assurance (GNAC) is an informal structure, functioning as a national reference point of EQAVET; its members come from six institutional national authorities responsible for the management and implementation of the VET system in Romania.

A very interesting example in **NI (UK)** comes from the Lifelong Learning Working group of the Belfast Strategy Partnership (Local Government, Health Trust and related government departments) where a set of important findings were pinpointed in order to promote suitable changes in the VET system in order to foster the employability and the effective linkage of the training to the territorial vocations.

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