

Quality Networks in Vocational Education and Training

Guidelines for implementation

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Introduction

Quality of the vocational education and training (VET) is a high priority of the European and national states policies, ensuring a work force and processes in the labour market of high quality. Quality of VET also fosters employability and contributes for a dynamic labour market in Europe and in global economy.

In the Council Recommendations of 24 of November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the European Commission calls the Member States to ensure, that:

- *“vocational education and training curricula, programme offers and qualifications are regularly updated, as relevant, building on skills intelligence (i.e. graduate tracking systems, skills anticipation mechanisms, including at sectoral and regional levels);*
- *providers of vocational education and training have, in line with national context, an appropriate degree of autonomy, flexibility, support and funding to adapt their training offer to changing skills needs, green and digital transitions and economic cycles, while ensuring quality.”*

To ensure the education and vocational training of high quality, collaboration of the different actors at regional, national and European level is essential. Therefore, the project *QUANTUM – QUALity Networks: fine-Tuning Monitoring systems for better performances in VET* provides *guidelines* aims to link different key actors in VET at national and European level, as well as exploitation of quality assurance tools as an inspiration for VET providers to be used for monitoring quality of educational institutions.

The demand for sharing information and collaboration of different actors at national and European level has been established during the research phase conducted by the Quantum project partners, namely during the focus group meetings in the initial stage of the project. The *Guidelines* are based upon the results of the focus groups meetings conducted in all project countries (i.e., Italy, Portugal, Austria and Slovakia).

These guidelines for implementation of Quality Networks on national level, as well as management of their cross-border collaboration within the project and beyond. Also the document serves as a source of inspiration for VET providers who wish to establish or strengthen a system of quality assurance based on feedback mechanisms at their institutions, with a specific focus on key stakeholders’ involvement. The Guidelines for VET Quality Networks setting up and implementation is one of the outputs of the project QUANTUM.

1. Key concepts

The purpose of the Guidelines is to provide key stakeholders involved in quality assurance of vocational education and training with practical hints on the possibility of collaboration on international, national, regional or local level and the tools which serve best the purpose of contributing to better employability of VET graduates on the labour market.

The Guidelines are based on the following concepts:

1.1 Network

Network is a group of people, organizations, or places that are connected or that work together. (Macmillan dictionary)

Networking and collaboration in education is popular for many reasons:

- it supports improving and sharing knowledge, ideas, competences, policies, actions, projects, funds and other resources,
- it creates learning communities and professional learning opportunities,
- it feeds motivation and purpose,
- it helps to generate solutions with like-minded peers,
- it supports change and improvement.

The management of a network is usually based on one of two main principles:

Formal and informal mechanisms regarding management

Mechanisms	
'Informal'	'Formal'
Recognition of informal networks	Recognition of formal authority structures
Shared leadership	Centralised leadership
Bottom-up decision-making	Top-down decision-making
Open organisational structure	Rigid organisational structure
Open communication	Closed communication

Picture 1: Management of a network in education, Vaessen et al., 2014

1.2 Quality Network

The concept of Quality Network was introduced by the QUANTUM projects in order to reach the objectives of the project and to develop a transferable model which can support ensuring quality monitoring of VET provision at regional, national, local or transnational level. **Quality Network is a model of systemic cooperation among VET providers, businesses, trade unions, representatives of learners, key policy actors and other stakeholders aimed at developing and sharing of quality assurance (QA) practices at regional, national and international level based on feedback mechanisms, facilitating mutual learning and reinforcing trust.**

Quality Network activities are based on so-called outcome/output indicators no. 4, 5 and 6, defined by the EQAVET Recommendation¹, which aim to support **employability of VET graduates** and response of the VET systems and provides to the **needs and requirements of the labour market**:

Indicator 4	Purpose of the Policy
<p>Completion rate in VET programmes</p> <p>Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes - Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate - Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
<p>Indicator no 4 is an output/outcome indicator which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Assists in achieving basic information on educational achievements, calculating dropout rates compared to participation rates, supporting successful completion and adapted training provision, particularly for disadvantaged groups; b) May be used in the planning, implementation, evaluation and review phases of the quality cycle; c) May be also used for budgetary target setting and benchmark results by comparing VET providers' results at national level. 	
Indicator 5	Purpose of the Policy
<p>Placement rate in VET programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support employability - Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
Indicator 6	Purpose of the Policy
<p>Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase employability - Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups

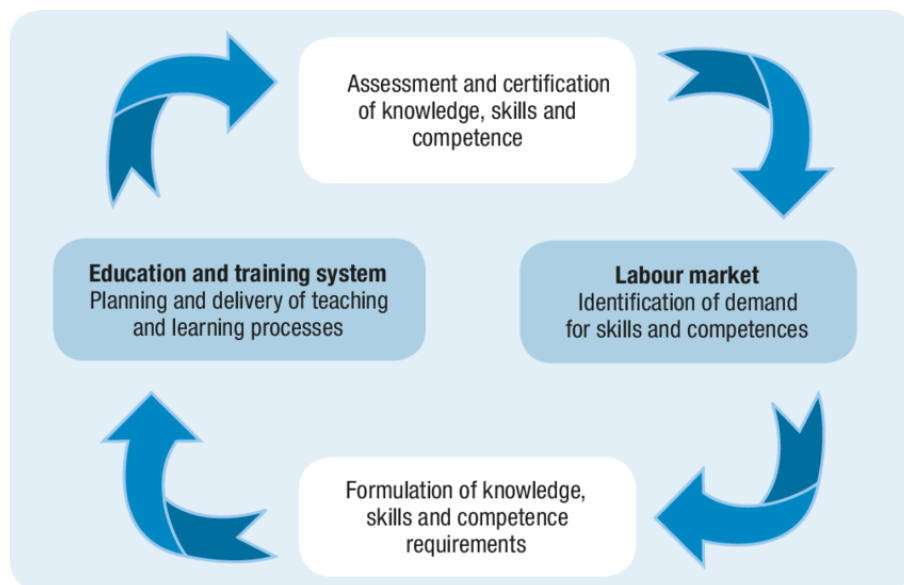
¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)

b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences	
<p>Indicator no. 6 is an outcome indicator which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Assists in increasing the employability of VET learners, in improving the responsiveness of VET to the changing demands of the labour market and in supporting adapted training provision, particularly for disadvantaged groups; b) May be used for the planning, implementation, evaluation and review phases of the quality cycle. 	

1.3 Feedback mechanisms, feedback loops²

Feedback mechanisms are procedures implemented by institutions that allow systems (and their parts) continuously renew and adapt to labour market needs. They represent communication between the world of education and labour market as a crucial factor for ensuring of relevance of education and qualifications provided by VET. New or updated qualifications, VET programmes and curricula are based on the interaction between the labour market (companies, chambers of commerce, employer and employee organisations, etc.) and the education system (VET providers, school boards, education ministries).

According to CEDEFOP, feedback is “transmission of findings from the evaluation process to relevant parties. This may involve collection and dissemination of findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons gained from experience”³.



² Based on CEDEFOP: Renewing VET provision: Understanding feedback mechanisms between initial VET and the labour market

³ “Glossary – Quality in education and training” – Cedefop TI-30-11-211-3A-NISBN: 978-92-896-0740-705/09/2011

Feedback mechanisms are present on two levels – formal feedback mechanisms (cooperation between national institutions and labour market actors, e.g. sectoral council, trade unions, ministries, etc.) and informal feedback mechanisms, such as:

- local school boards
- professional internships
- exchange programmes
- dual systems, work-based training
- alumni networks
- career fairs
- projects in companies
- school at work initiatives (in-company learning in cooperation with schools)
- work at school initiatives (experienced professionals provide supervision and professional skills training in school).

Feedback mechanisms can be targeted at various goals of change, e.g.:

- provision of new learning opportunities, new programmes, new providers;
- design of curricula, new subjects, new qualifications, educational/occupational/assessment standards, etc.
- resources - learning and teaching materials, textbooks, learning technologies, teacher qualifications;
- processes - actual design of instruction, instruction or assessment methods applied.

2. Quality Networks implementation

2.1 Main features of a Quality Network

1. Quality Network provides a framework for key stakeholders **to contribute and cooperate** in order to increase the level of quality in VET, especially by effective use of feedback loops/mechanisms.
2. Quality Network serves as a platform for **transmitting findings** obtained within the feedback mechanisms applied by the Network to relevant institutions, stakeholders and other parties with the aim to contribute to better VET responsiveness to the labour market needs,
3. Quality Network allows for national and international **discussion about the effectiveness and usability of tools** supporting quality assurance.
4. Quality Network involves its members in **capacity building, mutual learning and sharing good practices** relating to the recent developments and quality assurance in VET.

2.2. Establishment of a Quality Network

Quality Networks are voluntary bodies which can act on local, regional, national and international level. The nature and focus of the Quality Network depends on the conditions and environment, in which the Quality Network shall operate. The pilot phase of Quality Networks implementation within the QUANTUM project has identified 4 steps for the Quality Networks establishment:

1. **Mapping key stakeholders at regional and national level.** A mapping exercise is an important step in order to identify the actors in VET in a respective country/region/institution and the level of their possible involvement in the Network. The output of mapping serves as a base for the database of potential members.
2. **Preparation and implementation of focus groups with stakeholders.** Focus groups offers an opportunity for the first contact with the target group. In addition, they help to define those aspects in the VET context, which the Quality Network can refer to by its activities.
3. **Analysis of the results from focus groups.** Analysis of the participants' responses serves as an evidence and a starting line for the Quality Network.
4. **Inviting stakeholders into Quality Networks.**

Main stakeholders for Quality Networks are:

VET PROVIDERS	PUBLIC AUTHORITIES and SOCIAL PARTNERS	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers / trainers - VET schools' associations - Headmasters - Education managers - Quality managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministries - Regional authorities - Public institutions - Employers' associations / organizations - Trade unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SMEs - <i>small, medium, micro-enterprises</i> - Entrepreneurs

Project QUANTUM: National and regional networks

Within the QUANTUM project, 4 Quality Networks are being developed in Austria, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia. Each national setting has different specificities that the previous activities of the project (i.e., country reports on focus groups; meetings/brainstorming within the QUANTUM consortium), brought to light. In order to implement and sustain a QN, the following items are described below for each national context: (i) national scenario; (ii) strategy to implement a QN; (iii) implementation process at national level.

The regional quality network in Salzburg, **Austria** will be established to link all key stakeholders in the field of elementary education in order to enrich the future of elementary education with their expert knowledge. We focus on elementary education, as there is currently an acute shortage of skilled workers in kindergartens and crèches in the province of Salzburg. Politicians are currently working on improving the VET-training and framework conditions for elementary teachers. Our aim with our Quantum Quality Network is to create suitable structures to put the discussion on a broad and sustainable basis that promotes cooperation between stakeholders in VET and provides an opportunity for mutual learning and professional growth.

The **Italian** context is characterised by the presence of multiple institutional players at national and regional levels, in addition to the relevant role of the social partners. Title V (article 117) of the Constitution provides for ownership either by the State, the regions or mechanisms for cooperation between the different institutions, in relation to the type of training supply:

- the State establishes general rules and determines the fundamental principles of education;
- the regions have legislative power over VET;
- education falls under the scope of concomitant legislation, except for the autonomy of education institutions.

In light of the interweaving of the different intervention areas, ministries of education and labour and the regions define formal agreements within the State-regions conference. The aim is to define matters of common interest, although at different levels of responsibility. [...] Reference should be made to the role of the social partners, who contribute to defining and creating active employment policies, especially in relation to VET (in particular lifelong training)⁴.

The regional Quality Network in **Italy** is expected to:

1. Improve the programming, monitoring and evaluation system of the ESF interventions to improve the VET training offer and to analyse its effects in terms of employability, especially for young Umbrian people who undertake vocational training pathways, by analysing the feedback coming from the VET system (ARPAL – Regional Agency for Active Labour Market policies, schools and vocational training agencies/centres, companies hosting apprenticeships). In this sense, the regional VET offer and the employment policy can be continuously monitored and improved also by using more appropriate indicators and interventions in the new planning of the ESF ROP (also in coherence with and on the basis of what established by EQAVET and the National Quality Plan). Therefore, it is appropriate to also consider the value of the NQ for the ongoing partnership debate on the new 2021-2027 ESF ROP programming in which all the institutional and economic-social partnership subjects are called upon to participate. By way of example, through the Quantum project, guidelines for the involvement of local stakeholders in the implementation of the NQs will also be produced shortly.

⁴ Cedefop, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/italy-2019>

2. Foster the implementation in Umbria of the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social equity and resilience in which the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) is redefined.
3. Promote a revision of the accreditation system for training activities and of the accreditation system for employment services that, consistently with Regional Law no. 11 of 7 July 2021 Further amendments and additions to Regional Law No 1 of 14 February 2018 (Integrated system for the labour market, lifelong learning and employment promotion. Establishment of the Regional Agency for Active Labour Policies) and with the EQAVET Recommendation, to improvement of the regional VET system by strengthening:
 - a new cultural approach to accreditation, aimed at monitoring the quality of training systems and employment services as a continuous dynamic process, through the in itinere observation of the implementing body throughout its stay within the system
 - the effectiveness of accreditation as a tool for quality assurance and promotion, by defining a closer relationship between possible non-conformities and actions for their recovery;
 - structured procedures for analysing needs and activating networks and relations with the territory,
 - the detection of satisfaction on the part of enterprises and the work outcomes of users,
 - standards with reference to the training of trainers (number of users involved and dedicated resources),
 - the construction and implementation of regional information systems (with the possibility of connection at national level) for the collection of data on vocational training.
4. To contribute concretely to the implementation of the Regional Observatory of the Labour Market aimed at monitoring market needs and a useful tool for the definition of VET policies supported by the Region, by piloting multi-stakeholders' cooperation in the field of quality assurance and employability.

The setting up of the Quality Network at regional level represents an opportunity for the Region to improve the quality of the monitoring system of the ESF interventions by implementing the European Recommendation through new cooperation practices at local level among the various actors and also through the definition of a set of indicators and objectives allowing a quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the results of the vocational education and training systems in Umbria (with particular reference to Indicators no. 4-5-6 established by EQAVET).

The Quality Network is expected to bring together all stakeholders, both private and public, who share the objective of skills development and workforce continuous training in Umbria, to enable people to participate in the dual transition. Public-private cooperation will be facilitated, in particular by establishing partnerships with regional spill overs in the strategic industrial ecosystems and priority sectors identified in the European Green Deal, in order to achieve ambitious commitments. All stakeholders can have a voice and be involved in the regional NQ, especially SMEs that struggle to gain access to skills and could thus contribute more effectively to raising the quality of the training-labour system.

The creation of the regional Quality network is perfectly in line with the Observatory's objectives and also expresses an alliance between the public and private sectors for a participatory and shared management of the labour market so that the stakeholders actually contribute to the definition of employment policies and instruments suited to the needs of the Umbrian territory and enterprises. Finally, the Quality network can represent a testing ground for synergic working practices among the various key stakeholders of training and the labour market, useful to concretise the territorial networks for lifelong learning as envisaged by Law 92/2012, as key factors for achieving the

objectives set by the EU recommendation in terms of low-skilled adults involved in training activities, qualified young people in employment, etc.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has a strong tradition **in Slovakia** and it is one of the essential components of education here. Orientation for industry, subcontracting manufacture and former directly linking schools with businesses create good preconditions so that VET can be further developed.

Despite growing interest in general education, participation in VET at 67.8% in 2018 is stable and significantly above the EU average of 47.8%.

The Act no. 61 on VET adopted in 2015 introduced elements of **'dual education'** inspired by the German system, but adapted to the Slovak context, with involvement of employers in VET provision and in teacher training. Amendments to this act, in force since September 2018, further support school-company cooperation. One of the deciding factors in the success of introducing a dual system of education in Slovakia is long-term exposure of German and Austrian companies, especially in the automotive industry, mechanical engineering and electrical engineering as bearers of experiences with the dual education in these countries.

The founders of the secondary vocational schools are the **self-governing regions**, which also prepares **performance plans** for every school year (set up the numbers of learners for particular departments and schools) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR (MŠVVaŠ SR). The performance plans should help to prevent mismatches of education and labour market. MŠVVaŠ SR is the main governing and policy and decision - making body of VET system creating state educational programmes. MŠVVaŠ SR is also responsible for quality assurance (QA) in VET at the system level.

The State vocational Education institute (ŠIOV) is a reference point of the European initiatives – EQAVET, ECVET, EQF, EUROPASS, EPALE, and the National Coordinator of the European Agenda of Adult Learning. ŠIOV is an implementer of many activities which increase quality and attractiveness of VET, including creation of strategies, such as **national strategy of adult learning** which should be a base for new legislation act on the lifelong learning. The strategy includes continuous VET (c-VET) and introduces **Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)**, as the engines of innovation, research and cooperation of educational institution and employers.

Slovakia's national network of excellent VET providers, labelled Centres of Excellence for VET (CoVET), aims to create public-private partnerships between schools and companies in order to deliver high quality training, both in IVET and CVET programmes.

In order to implement a **Quality Network** in Slovakia, ŠIOV and the Association of Secondary Vocational Schools of Slovakia (ASOSS) have agreed to work closely together, and they have committed to do so within a Memorandum on Cooperation signed on 16 April 2021. The Memorandum confirms their mutual support in promoting innovation and improving quality of education in secondary vocational schools and their status. Within the framework of the Memorandum, both institutions set out concrete steps for mutual cooperation, including the creation of a professional discussion platform on the new direction of vocational education. In 2022, ŠIOV organized a discussion forum with representatives of secondary industrial schools from which several conclusions emerged – mainly assistance and support in addressing the topics. For this purpose, a working group would be set up, whose activities would be supported by ŠIOV, which will provide a platform for regular discussions on building a network of quality/excellent VET institutions and human resources development while using the instruments of quality assurance based on feedback loops, including strengthening awareness on EQAVET, peer review, graduate tracking, alumni clubs, etc.

In the context of these activities and the QUANTUM project, ŠIOV will focus the training on "Capacity building for Quality Networks implementation and sustainability" mainly on the development of human resources with a view of using the instruments of quality assurance based

on feedback loops, including strengthening awareness on EQAVET, peer review, graduate tracking, alumni clubs, etc. to implement and sustain a long-term informal network of QC key-actors that will come together regularly to debate quality within the framework of the QUANTUM project and QN approach.

In **Portugal**, regarding the **(i) national scenario**, VET is a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour (and related bodies), underlining the difficulties to implement one single mechanism to be used by all different types of VET providers and include all variety of VET provision. Two key stakeholders in the field of QA (Quality Assurance) in VET in Portugal are IEFP (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training) and ANQEP, I.P. (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education). IEFP covers certification of its own network of providers (including Apprenticeship providers) and is responsible for awarding (according to pre-defined criteria and procedures) the Certificate of Pedagogical Competences that is mandatory to all trainers who want to deliver training within the framework of the NQS. Regarding ANQEP (depending on the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Economics), also a public authority, is currently the EQAVET National Reference Point; has an important role in QA for all types of VET provision under their supervision (qualifications level 2 to level 5 NQF/EQF); since 2014 responsible for promoting, monitoring and supporting the implementation of QAS (quality assurance systems) for training processes and for the results obtained by students from professional schools, and certify them as EQAVET “compatible” systems. ANQEP defined a model for the alignment of quality assurance systems with the EQAVET framework (mandatory for professional schools but also applicable to other types of VET providers offering IVET for young people at level 4 of the NQF/EQF, on a voluntary basis), being responsible for defining the technical methodological support guidelines, both for the process of aligning and for the process of checking the conformity of the QAS implemented with the EQAVET framework. This “national EQAVET model” (as we call it) requires data collection by the VET providers on the EQAVET indicators addressed by the QUANTUM project (5 and 6a and 6b), in addition to the EQAVET indicator 4a) on the completion of VET courses. The data are collected and uploaded in a common platform, that allows monitoring of results according to several criteria.

(ii) The strategy to implement a QN, and looking at the Portuguese QA landscape, taking on board the national VET scenario, CECOIA decided to develop a strategy aiming at testing, implementing, and sustaining in a long-term proposal an informal network of VET providers with a specific location in the VET frame: the Qualifica Centers (QA) that are state-supported validation and qualification centres for adults. In 2016, the Portuguese government launched the QC programme, aiming at improving the qualification levels of adults and providing a better way for entrance in the labour market. The philosophy underpinning QC is based upon a lifelong learning perspective, looking at the interconnection between education, vocational training, qualification and employment of adults, one of the major challenges in Portugal, which is the second country in the EU with the highest number of population without secondary education (52% for 22,5% EU average). Currently, there are 303 QA all around the country.

(iii) Implementation process at national level: going from the current ANQEP report proposal of self-assessment, CECOIA will focus QUANTUM training on “*Capacity building for Quality Networks implementation and sustainability*” mainly in exploring peer review methodology to implement and sustain a long-term informal network of QC key-actors that will come together once a year to debate quality within the frame of the QUANTUM project and QN approach. The QCs do not use peer Review methodology, and one of the main conclusions of the Focus Group made in Portugal was that peer review methodology needs to be acknowledged and used in Portugal at a national level. Indeed, peer review has only been used in the framework of European projects. CECOIA has

been one of the first VET providers to use it in 2006 in IVET, in 2009 in CVET, in 2012 in Educational and Vocational Guidance for Adults and in 2016 in Adult Education. In addition, 8 training providers (CECOA included) already worked with in the application of peer review in VET in Portugal within projects CECOA was involved in. As far as we could identify, apart from those, 9 other organisations were also involved in the application of peer review in VET in Portugal.

2.2. Coordination of a Quality Network

Regional and national networks associate main actors who can contribute to quality assurance in VET on a voluntary basis. To ensure operability of Quality Networks, a coordination body should be identified among the Network members. Main tasks of a QN's co-ordinator include:

- Linking key VET stakeholders for cooperation,
- Organising regular meetings of QN (online and/or presence meetings);
- Fostering dialogue, information sharing and mutual learning among QN's members,
- Providing training on quality-related issues for QN's members,
- Maintaining a database of QN members and publishing it on the web-site www.quality-networks.eu,
- Acting as a secretariat of the Network, by providing documentation, internal communication, minutes of the meetings and other relevant documents affecting the QN functioning.

Project QUANTUM: Activities for the Quality Networks

One of the activity provided to members of the QN within the QUANTUM project are training and peer learning activities (IO2 - Capacity building for Quality Networks implementation and sustainability), which will increase awareness about QA and tools for VET providers.

Another activity of the QN will be a discussion of QN members about the usability of QA system and the usability of the data obtained through surveys (e.g. questionnaires). Therefore, the activities of QN will strengthen the phase four (Review) of the quality cycle (see above) through the common dialogue, commenting on the QA system of VET providers, and planning of the next actions.

2.3 International cooperation between Quality Networks

The regional/national QNs are encouraged to cooperate on international level with the purpose of mutual learning activities. These activities include peer learning (on-line and on-site) and sharing of good practice. QNs can also benefit from international peer reviews.

3. Methods and tools for monitoring VET systems by Quality Networks

As already mentioned, Quality Networks focus their activities on increasing efficiency of VET by supporting employability of VET graduates and increasing responsiveness of VET provision to the labour market needs, while using feedback collected within the system.

To achieve this goal, Quality Networks explore, analyse, adapt, utilize and evaluate these methods and tools for quality assurance:

- **EQAVET – European Framework for Quality Assurance in VET,**
- **European Peer Review methodology,**
- **Graduate tracking.**

3.1 EQAVET – European Framework for Quality Assurance in VET

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training is the starting point for quality assurance in the EU. The EQAVET framework was introduced by the EU Recommendation (2009), which defined quality criteria, indicative descriptors and a set of ten indicators that serve as tools for assessing VET quality assurance. The indicators reflect the three main priorities of European vocational education and training policies:

- increasing employability,
- improving the match between supply and demand,
- and better access to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable people.

The basic principle of EQAVET is the quality cycle (or also the EQAVET cycle), which copies the PDCA quality model. The cycle can be used on the institutional (VET provider) level or on system (VET policy) level.



Picture 2: quality cycle/ EQAVET cycle

The EQAVET cycle has four phases:

1. **Planning**, - is the phase in which clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives are set up in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources. It is important that these goals are defined through a dialogue of the key VET stakeholders;
2. **Implementation** - establishes the procedures to ensure achievement of goals and objectives (e.g. development of partnership, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational or operational procedures.)

3. **Assessment and Evaluation** - the achievements and outcomes are assessed and evaluated by collecting and processing data in order to make an informed assessment. The sources of information might be the questionnaires filled by learners, alumni, parents, teachers, trainers and/or employers.
4. **Review** - includes the development of procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and new objectives after processing feedback. Key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis in order to devise procedures for change, usually in the form of an action plan which should bring the change and improvement.

The EQAVET Recommendation defines **10 indicators of quality** which „support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers“⁵. The indicators help to monitor changes in areas such as VET system/provider’s performance, students’ performance, connecting education and the labour market as well as social contexts influencing VET efficiency:

1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers
2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers
3. Participation rate in VET programmes
4. Completion rate in VET programmes
5. Placement rate in VET programmes
6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace
7. Unemployment rate
8. Prevalence of vulnerable group
9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market
10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET.

The EQAVET indicators provide quick feedback on the overall performance of a VET institution and allow to respond quickly to any problems or weaknesses in the school performance. VET providers can choose the choice of indicators according to its goals and priorities.

The individual EQAVET indicators at a provider’s level (selected for the project) can be monitored through the following questions:

Indicator 4: Completion rate of VET programs

- How does a VET provider keep records of the number of graduates and early school leavers?
- How is this data used to manage the quality of education?
- Does a VET provider prepare a summary report / analysis of this data?

Indicator 5: Job placement rate in VET programs

- Does a VET provider monitor its graduates, their subsequent employment in further study or employment?

⁵ Ibid.

- How is this data collected and how often?
- Does a VET provider prepare a summary report / analysis of this data?

Indicator 6: Utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace

- What mechanisms does a VET provider use to determine whether and how educational programs are relevant to the labour market?
- Does a VET provider cooperate with labour market representatives? How does it ensure that employers are satisfied with the provision of training?
- Does a VET provider conduct regular surveys in this area and how does it work with information to improve its quality?

3.2 Graduate tracking

In 2017, the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates, which proposed the establishment of graduate tracking systems, was adopted as a response to the New Skills Agenda (2016), a strategic document of the European Commission, which called for a „*better understanding of the performance of graduates*“.

The Recommendation acknowledges that initiatives and systems for collecting information about leavers of higher and vocational education and training could benefit from improvement and standardisation.

Graduate tracking is „*the collection of quantitative micro and aggregate data and/or qualitative information about the employment and social outcomes of people leaving higher education and vocational education and training. Tracking graduates can provide crucial intelligence about the quality of learning programmes in higher education and vocational education and training and the extent to which it meets labour market needs.*“⁶ The main purpose of the graduate tracking in VET is monitoring of educational policies, quality assurance (QA) and provision of the career guidance, and also strategic planning of course offers and funding. The results of graduate tracking can also help applicants and their parents to make well-informed decisions about their future educational and career paths.

The member states are recommended to conduct graduate tracking on system level⁷.

VET providers might benefit from graduate tracking and use its results as a feedback to the process of VET, and use the conclusions of the research (graduate tracking) especially during the four phase of the quality cycle (Review).

The purpose of graduate tracking by a VET institution can be multiple:

⁶ https://pmb.cereq.fr/doc_num.php?explnum_id=7200, p ii

⁷ Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (2017): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209(01)&from=EN)

- It helps to keep contacts with former students, to follow their pathways within education system and labour market,
- It provides graduates' feedback on the quality of education obtained and skills used and, based on this feedback, improve and innovate curricula in line with labour market needs.

Graduate tracking involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data from graduates through surveys, which include mainly employment status, socio-biographical and socioeconomic information, further education and training pathways, link to level, field of study and provider, satisfaction, relevance/utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace and place of residence/migration to other countries. Surveys should be mainly conducted online through digital forms that allow a fast and reliable set of data, to be easily treated and analysed for specific purpose. Of course, they can be also carried out by telephone or through paper-based methods⁸.

The questionnaire should contain questions which enable to bring a picture of current status of the graduates, e.g.:

- if the graduates are employed or they continue in studies,
- if their workplace is connected to the studied programme,
- if they use the skills obtained during vocational training,
- if the job/work tasks are consistent with those learned during vocational training
- if they are satisfied with the workplace and level of the preparation for job provided by vocational training;
- a level of satisfaction with their salaries,
- if they left the country of origin and why?

Information provided by graduates should lead to the improvement of VET provision. Following the EQAVET cycle, results of evaluation and assessment of the data are crucial for planning of other activities that should lead to the increasing of quality level of the provided study programme.

To conduct successful graduate tracking on institutional level, these steps are necessary:

1. To identify the purpose of conducting graduate tracking
2. To hold private e-mail addresses for graduates to ensure a return of questionnaires
3. Prepare questionnaire on the base of which data need to be collected (purpose)
4. To plan and conduct the research periodically and in right time (e.g. 6 months after the graduation, 12 months, 24 months, etc.)
5. To adequately prepare the personnel conducting such survey (teachers, quality coordinators, etc.)
6. To analyse the obtained data in group of interested persons and possible other VET key/school stakeholders

⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5c71362f-a671-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> , p. 14

7. To ensure to use the obtained data for improvement of VET (in the phase of planning), through an appropriate written plan of improvement.
8. To inform all the QN members and those associated on the achievements and what planned in the Plan of Improvement.

The quality of institutional tracking varies considerably. It is not realistic to expect the answers by 100% of graduates even if VET providers hold their e-mail addresses. To obtain more than 50% of answers is considered as successful research.

Important part of the graduate tracking mechanism is a **synthesis and the analysis of the obtained data**. It should be carried out by a self-assessment team (headmaster, deputy headmasters, teachers, trainers). It is useful to involve other VET key stakeholders (external). The results can be published, use for the next phase of quality cycle (planning) or both. **During the analysis the strengths and areas of improvement should be defined**. Objectives and targets can be defined as well. **The conclusions based on results (objectives and targets) should be implemented to an action plan of the school**.

3.3 Alumni club

An effective way to facilitate access to graduates is the alumni club of the school. Alumni clubs allow to get the most up-to-date information on the graduate's contacts and allow to carry out specialized surveys that meet the needs of the school. Also, thanks to the internet and social networks, the Alumni clubs have a potential to become an effective tool for data gathering and conducting the research.

Cooperation with graduates has a positive effect on:

- creating a positive image of the school through individual stories of successful career path building,
- improving career guidance, building professional networks and contacts, providing traineeships, mentoring and job opportunities,
- improving the quality of education by providing feedback, providing expertise in the sector in which they operate, co-creating educational programs and activities,
- obtaining resources that increase the quality of teaching (financial, material - eg machines, devices, programs, etc.).

3.4 Peer Review methodology

Peer review methodology is based on a combination of internal and external evaluation of a VET institution. Feedback to a VET institution is provided by trained peers, i.e. colleagues from other VET institutions on areas selected by the assessed school with the goal of their improvement. Peer Reviews can directly contribute to the improvement of those areas where VET providers themselves recognise difficulties.

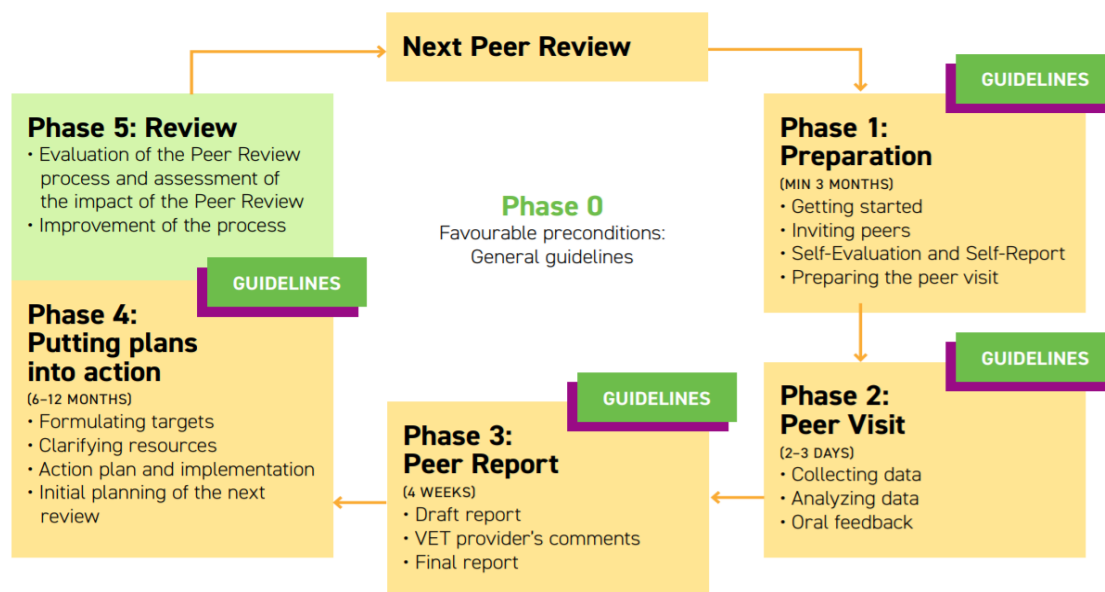
Peer reviews can focus on these „quality areas“ which are detailed in the manual for users⁹:

1. Curricula
2. Learning and teaching
3. Assessment
4. Learning
5. Social environment and accessibility
6. Management and administration
7. Institutional ethos and strategic planning
8. Infrastructure and financial resources
9. Staff allocation, recruitment and development
10. Working conditions of staff
11. External relations and internationalisation
12. Social participation and interactions
13. Gender mainstreaming
14. Quality management and evaluation

The activities of Quality Networks shall primarily focus on the area no. 14 – Quality management and evaluation.

Peer reviews can be implemented internationally which allows inclusion of international peers that assess VET providers alongside national peers (transnational peer review).

The cycle of peer review and its individual steps are included in the following scheme:



Picture 1: Phases of the European Peer Review¹⁰

⁹ The European Peer Review Methodology was developed under the project "Peer Review in initial VET" and subsequently adapted according to needs in various EU countries. <http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/manual.php>

¹⁰ Source: Gutknecht-Gmeiner, M. (ed.) (2007). European Peer Review Manual for initial VET. Vienna: öibf – Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung in European Peer Review Quality Areas and Criteria for VET providers https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/A5%20c4%29%20Peer-review-leaflet_2021-03-29-V2_0.pdf

Conclusions

Quality networks are non-formal structures which goals, focus areas, functions and level of operation vary according to their purpose. This also influences selection of stakeholders participating in the network.

However, a general characteristics of Quality Networks can be defined as:

“a renewed cooperation model among VET providers and other lifelong learning actors at local level to reinforce trust among the stakeholders and facilitate mutual learning”.

The general focus of Quality Networks can be defined as:

“an approach based on common monitoring system and tools, adapted to the country context and economic and educational specific needs, as an evidence-based system to modernise VET, enhance quality of VET systems, provision and teachers/trainers performance, which actively involves VET stakeholders for a more systematic and widespread implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in VET.” (QUANTUM Project application).

Quality Networks, in line with their specific goals, are platforms which reinforce:

- mutual cooperation of key actors in VET,
- support proactive role of each of VET key stakeholders,
- create opportunities for learning and capacity building,
- facilitate an evidence-based policy making in VET by collecting and transferring information and data,
- develop tools for collecting and processing feedback in VET with the aim of improvement and increasing quality of VET provision.

Further reading and references:

- The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET, 2009): https://www.google.com/search?q=eqavet+recommendation&rlz=1C1GCEU_skSK962SK962&oq=EQAVET+re&aqs=chrome.0.0i19j69i57j0i19i22i30l4j69i61j69i60.2331j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
- The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020): <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29>
- Council Recommendation on tracking graduates (2017): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209\(01\)&from=EN7](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209(01)&from=EN7)
- Graduate tracking: a 'how to do it well' guide (2020): <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5c71362f-a671-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- European Peer Review Manual for vocational education & training <http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/manual.php?lang=EN>
- EQAVET Indicators' Toolkit
- Graduate tracking: a 'how to do it well' guide, Európska komisia, 2020
- Handbook for VET providers: Supporting internal quality management and quality culture. Cedefop2015 https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3068_en.pdf
- Vaessen^a, Matthieu & Van den beemt, Antoine & Laat, Maarten. (2014). Networked professional learning: Relating the formal and the informal. Frontline Learning Research. 2. 10.14786/flr.v2i2.92.



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QUANTUM Checklist

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QUALITY AREA: **Preparing the ground for stakeholders' consultation and a Quality Network (QN)**

Criteria	Indicator(s)	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Self-assessment/ Comments <i>Instructions for filling this column: if the answer is 'Yes' or 'Partly', please describe how it is done in your VET organization/system; if the answer is 'No' or 'N/A', please explain why it is the case and if some action in the suggested direction could be beneficial for your VET provider/system.</i>
Preparatory activities	Relevant stakeholders are mapped and include all the categories of actors such as public authorities, private and public VET providers, companies, employers, employees' representatives, learners.					
	Relevant stakeholders are consulted about their expectations from their cooperation and on the needs of the VET providers/ system from their perspective, with a special focus on placement rates and utilization of acquired competences in the labour market or further education.					
	The perspective and specificity of each stakeholder mapped is clearly shared within the potential network in order to maximise the added value of each actors in the process of continuous improvement of the VET system and in order to improve the sustainability of the cooperation in the long run.					



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	Level of awareness and competences of the different stakeholders on Quality Assurance in VET is assessed and eventual learning opportunities are planned.					
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QUALITY AREA: Setting up a Quality Network (QN)

Criteria	Indicator(s)	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Self-assessment/ Comments
						<i>Instructions for filling this column: if the answer is 'Yes' or 'Partly', please describe how it is done in your VET organization/system; if the answer is 'No' or 'N/A', please explain why it is the case and if some action in the suggested direction could be beneficial for your VET provider/system.</i>
Participating stakeholders	All relevant stakeholders are informed about the importance of collaborating for improving the quality of VET provision, including public and private VET providers, competent public authorities, companies and employers' representatives, workers' representatives, (former and prospect) learners.					
	It is clear for all the relevant stakeholders how to approach and be involved in the QN.					
	Access to the QN is regulated in a transparent and non-discriminatory way, ensuring rotation for those categories of stakeholders which are more numerous.					



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	Participating stakeholders are engaged in capacity building, mutual learning and sharing of good practices in topics such as feedback loops/mechanism results, recent developments and quality assurance in VET.					
Functioning mechanisms	All relevant stakeholders are grouped in a formalised/ formally established network/ platform/ committee, depending on the local, regional or national context of VET.					
	Internal managing rules are transparent and shared among all the participating actors.					
	There is a shared, transparent and formalised evaluation concept at VET provider/ system level – periods, procedures, topics, competences and responsibilities. It is coherent with ongoing EQAVET developments.					
	Internal communication is regular and result-oriented. It is done through a shared management tools, which simplify and optimise the horizontal exchange among participants (peer-to-peer approach).					
	Quality goals are set and distributed in a given timeline depending on local, regional or national priorities, and the Network works systematically on reaching such goals.					
	The QN conducts evaluation on a regular basis, applying the continuous improvement approach and thus ensuring a continuous					



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	process of development of the network itself and of the VET system.					
	The QN gathers relevant information about the satisfaction of the participating stakeholders and external VET organizations regularly and systematically (feedback culture). The collected information is processed and used for reflecting on the QN impact and performances.					
Funding & Sustainability	The QN has a flexible and cost-efficient management.					
	Funding is ensured in advance for a given period and regularly extended/re-approved, thanks to the participation of the public authorities.					
	Use of resources is managed transparently and subject to internal monitoring at designed points in time.					
	The work of the QN is adequately communicated at local, regional or national level (depending on the coverage of the network), raising interest/expectations from external stakeholders and thus strengthening its sustainability.					

QUALITY AREA: **EQAVET Indicator n° 5 – Placement rate in VET programmes**

Criteria	Indicator(s)	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Self-assessment/ Comments
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						<i>Instructions for filling this column: if the answer is 'Yes' or 'Partly', please describe how it is done in your VET organization/system; if the answer is 'No' or 'N/A', please explain why it is the case and if some action in the suggested direction could be beneficial for your VET provider/system.</i>
Destination of VET learners	Destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria is tracked (e.g. at 6 and 12 months).					
	Share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria is monitored.					
	Data are collected and analysed using a gender-disaggregated approach, and giving special attention to success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender.					
	In case of drop-outs, information on the destination of learners who have dropped out is collected and shared with relevant stakeholders, including VET providers and learners.					
	Data sources from different databases already in place are made mutually intelligible and easily communicate among them.					



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	The feedback on the destination of learners is easily accessible to all the participating stakeholders.					
	The QN uses data on placement rate actively as an input in policy-making. It empowers VET providers, employers and employees in making use of such data in their programming.					
Share of employed learners	The share of employed learners is in line with the stakeholders' expectations and the macro-dynamics of the labour market registered at national and EU level.					
	The share of employed learners in occupations coherent with the studied VET programme is in line with the stakeholders' expectations and the macro-dynamics of the labour market registered at national and EU level.					
	The results of monitoring Indicator n° 5 are used for budgetary target setting.					
	The results of monitoring Indicator n° 5 increase accessibility and attractiveness of VET programmes by demonstrating relevance of VET programme to employment and/or higher education.					

QUALITY AREA: EQAVET Indicator n° 6 – Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace



Criteria	Indicator(s)	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Self-assessment/ Comments <i>Instructions for filling this column: if the answer is 'Yes' or 'Partly', please describe how it is done in your VET organization/system; if the answer is 'No' or 'N/A', please explain why it is the case and if some action in the suggested direction could be beneficial for your VET provider/system.</i>
Information on occupation obtained	Information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria is collected (graduate tracking).					
	Graduate tracking is based on the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from graduates through surveys, including employment status, socio-biographical and socioeconomic information, further education and training pathways, link to level, field of study and provider, satisfaction, relevance/utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace and place of residence/migration to other countries.					
	Tools and mechanisms to monitor information on occupation of VET trainees are common within the QN. Results are share and their analysis inform the programming of all the different actors in the VET provider/ system.					
	Data are collected and analysed using a gender-disaggregated approach.					



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	The participation to the QN ensures adequate preparation of the personnel conducting graduate tracking and distributing the related monitoring tools (teachers, quality coordinators, etc.).					
	Learning results and occupational destination of VET learners are compared and analysed in an holistic approach by VET the providers/system.					
	Graduate tracking arrangements ensure taking decisions through qualified and reliable information also in relation to the <i>revision</i> phase of the Quality Assurance cycle.					
	The QN shares, monitors and elaborates (a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness.					
	Legal issues related to data protection on accessing individuals records are considered by the QN and written permissions from learners are obtained while they are still in the training.					
Satisfaction on acquired skills/competences	Assessment and self-assessment of the relevance of skills/competences with the VET provision is conducted using common tools and approaches.					
	Individuals/Former learners are satisfied with acquired skills/competences.					



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	Employers are satisfied with skills/competences acquired by the individuals participating in VET programmes.					
	The QN uses data on satisfaction of acquired skills/ competences actively as an input in policy-making. It empowers VET providers, employers and employees in making use of such data in their re-planning of VET programmes.					
	The design of new learning opportunities, new programmes and new providers is informed by the data collected and analysed at VET system level.					



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