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Matti Isokallio

Director, Satakunta Educational Federation

General Secretary, EUproVET

An article by Matti Isokallio, Director, Satakunta Educational Federation and General Secretary, EUproVET

The Council Recommendation[1] on tracking graduates addresses important elements for developing effective quality assurance policies and the Council's intention to promote productivity and employability is excellent. In the current situation, it is important that a graduate tracking system is implemented in each member state. Some common milestones will be needed to support European level comparisons and learning from good practice. It seems that, in the short or medium term, the greatest potential for effective graduate tracking is at the VET provider, regional or national level.

The Council Recommendation encourages member states to collect a large amount of data. This means, at the national or regional level, extensive preparation is needed to guarantee the data is of high quality as this helps to avoid misinterpretation or misuse. It is important that there is a clear distinction between using the graduate tracking data to develop VET policy and using the data to manage VET providers. This distinction is especially important if the source of the tracking data is based on socio-biographical or socio-economic information. In member states where responsibility for data collection and management is the responsibility of the VET provider, the Council Recommendation is more likely to lead to pressure for change at the political or policy level.

Some member states have established graduate tracking systems which meet their own needs. Some of these systems have an effect on the annual funding of VET providers. In these situations the tracking data should be based on the actions of individual VET providers e.g. VET providers have different graduate employment rates and this can be presented on an absolute or a relative scale in the region.

A good VET provider in an area of high unemployment could be more effective than a less successful VET provider in an area of high employment even though they have the same graduate unemployment rate. If the Council Recommendation leads to new initiatives, member states will need to plan to collect data which is valid, transparent and reliable.

From the VET providers' perspective graduate tracking can be an essential part of a quality assurance system. Many VET providers already quality assure their educational processes and outputs. A graduate tracking system helps to show differences in outcomes such as the employment rate, how many learners continue their studies etc. In addition, it can offer tools to evaluate and develop curricula; identify those parts of the curricula (modules) which have the highest relevance to employability; identify which modules (or units) support continuing personal development etc.

The results of any graduate tracking system are based on past information - depending on the system, the information can be from one or two years ago, and in the worst cases the delay can be several years. VET providers can also use graduate tracking systems, alongside other sources of information, to strengthen their decision making processes in relation to allocating resources to different fields of study. After a few years of using a tracking system based on repeated graduate tracking surveys, the VET provider will benefit from accumulating a great deal of information on the quality and outcomes from their provision.

Director, Satakunta Educational Federation
General Secretary, EUproVET
matti.isokallio@sataedu.fi

[1] November 2017 - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0249

EQAVET Secretariat
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

26 Denzille Lane, Dublin
D02 P266, Ireland

T: 00353 1 905 8144
E: info@eqavet.eu
W: www.eqavet.eu

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication includes only the view of EQAVET and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Tracking the quality of VET through students' evaluation of learning outcomes

Nino Buić
Assistant Director for European Affairs, International Cooperation and Projects, Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education (AVETAE) – Croatian NRP for EQAVET

Tamara Buble
Expert Associate for Project Preparation and Implementation, Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education (AVETAE) – Croatian NRP for EQAVET

An article by Nino Buić, Assistant Director for European Affairs and Tamara Buble, Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education (AVETAE) – Croatian NRP for EQAVET

The need to monitor students' transition from the world of education to the world of work has featured highly at the EU level and in many countries' policy agendas.

In Croatia, the Agency for Vocational Education, Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) has started a pilot project on VET graduate tracking at the VET provider level. The policy framework for this project was included in the national VET System Development Programme (2016-2020). One of the programme's goals (creating a coherent VET quality assurance system in line with the EQAVET recommendation) is connected to VET graduate tracking.

This pilot project is small scale and focuses on VET providers. It uses ERASMUS+ funding from Croatia's EQAVET National Reference Point (NRP) bid for 2017-2019. Two VET schools have been selected for the project which runs from October 2018 to February 2019.

The project began with the preparation of a background document which considered the tracking of VET graduates using the EQAVET+ methodology. The document placed a special emphasis on the challenges of collecting data connected to EQAVET indicator 5 (Placement rate in VET programmes) and indicator 6 (Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace). Based on the background document, a tracking instrument has been proposed – this includes an exit survey and longitudinal tracer study:

- the exit survey focuses on graduating VET students and aims to collect personal data; to inform graduates of the tracer study; and to gather information on graduates' career anticipations;
- the tracer study (which is more complex and detailed than the exit survey) is for VET graduates who completed their education one or preferably two years earlier. It gathers data on their current status in the labour market (including whether they are unemployed or in further education); the characteristics of their workplace; their views on the value and use of the skills and competences they acquired during their education; as well as collecting feedback on their VET provider.

Information from the survey and study is vital for the VET providers as it enables them to improve provision by matching training to the needs of the labour market and fostering students' personal and professional growth. The data helps providers to plan their educational activities; and develop their comparative advantage in the field of education.

The tracking instrument was presented at a two-day workshop in May 2018. This was attended by 18 representatives from the two pilot schools and ten additional schools covering 12 vocational sectors. Discussions in the workshop considered different ways to monitor students at the school and system level; how the data could be used by schools, by stakeholders or at the system level; and the guidance that the pilot schools' quality assurance teams would require. Based on the criteria for selecting the pilot VET schools, a third school was recognised as meeting the criteria and joined the process.

An exit survey for 2018 graduating students took place in the three pilot schools in June 2018. Alongside the survey (and to prepare for the tracer survey) the pilot schools started to collect contact information of students who graduated during the 2016/2017 school year. With the support of AVETAE and an external expert, the schools are establishing an online data collection system which will be tested in October 2018.

After the data has been gathered and analysed, the project will conclude with an evaluation workshop for VET schools and a joint report by the external expert and the schools involved in the pilot. The report and the workshop discussions will help to identify the:

- benefits, challenges and sustainability of the VET provider level tracking model;
- impact of the pilot project on the national plans.

Updates on the pilot project as well with all the relevant materials are available from Croatia's EQAVET NRP web page www.qavet.hr.

Quality assurance in the German dual system within the context of EQAVET

An article by Helena Sabbagh, Head of the German Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET, Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

Germany has been involved in the joint development of the EQAVET principles for quality assurance in VET from the outset, including the four stages of the quality assurance cycle – planning, implementation, evaluation and review. EQAVET's process-oriented approach is aligned to the philosophy of well-known quality management systems such as ISO and EFQM. These were originally created for industrial production processes and have been adapted to meet the general conditions and requirements of educational processes in schools and other institutions. For full time vocational schools this process-driven EQAVET Framework is a good fit. This approach works for vocational schools in Germany and this is why most of the 16 federal states use a standardised quality management system in their school system.

How is the quality of training assured in companies?

In the dual system the learning venue for trainees is the company – this is where they normally spend the majority of their time. In the German dual system the quality of training is assured in a different way. Alongside the laws, regulations and recommendations which stipulate the minimum standards for company-based training, there is scope for other quality assurance measures. These minimum standards are largely the result of negotiation processes which involve the social partners, the Federal Government and the federal states. Despite the different priorities and interests of employers and employee representatives, the consensus principle enables the German system to arrive at workable decisions. Quality is assured through VET experts from practice and policy-making seeking to find amicable solutions.
VET quality assurance is an area where decisions can be made 'close to practice' and this increases its acceptance with employers.

Quality assurance in company-based training in Germany departs from the process orientation approach adopted in the EQAVET Framework. The primary basis for quality assurance is in the setting of, compliance with and monitoring of minimum national standards within a context of general conditions.

These general conditions include definitions of the VET system e.g. the occupation principle which describes occupational areas (Berufsprinzip), the consensus principle which describes how stakeholder groups work together, the assumption that trade and industry takes responsibility for the quality of VET, and the role of the intermediate institutions (competent bodies) which have a central monitoring and support role in company-based training.

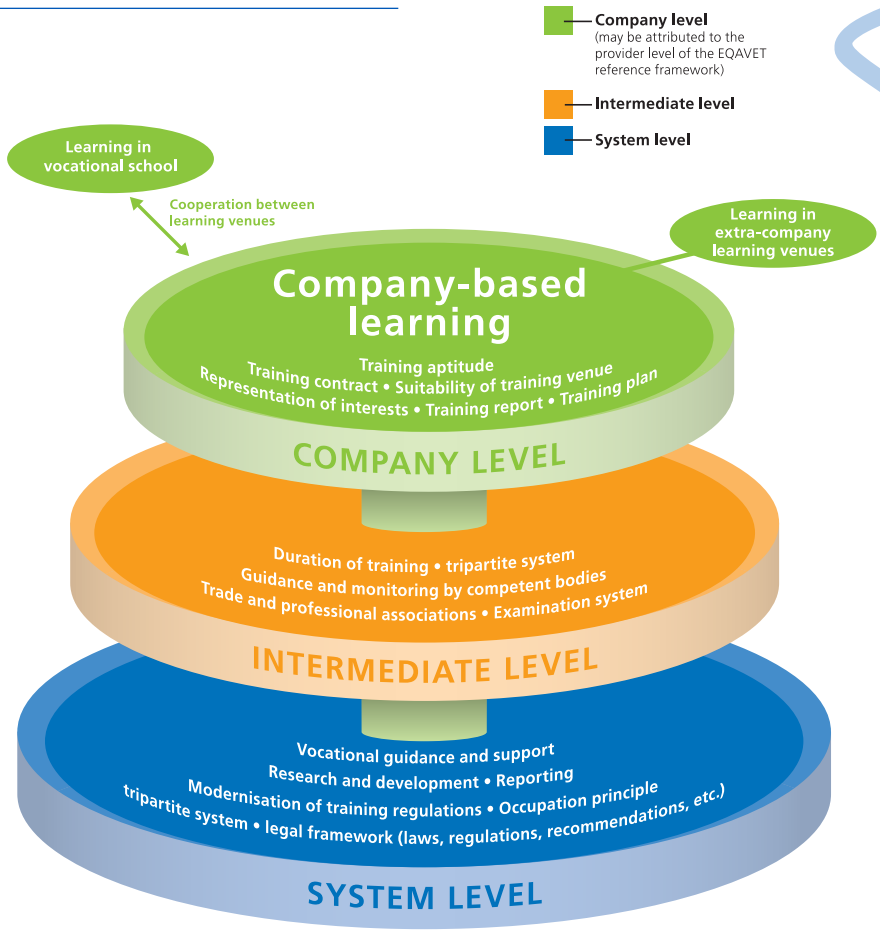
To summarise: the quality assurance of company-based training is based on quality assurance procedures such as legislation, regulations, inherited and traditional processes and principles which are connected and located at different levels in the VET systems. Even for Germans it is less common to describe the various elements of quality assurance in the dual system as an overall concept. Rather than talking about the quality assurance of VET, there is a tendency to talk about the 'modernisation of VET' and to refer to the individual parts of the system e.g. the training regulations, the examination systems etc.

This was the position when Germany's National Reference Point for EQAVET (DEQA-VET) was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to prepare a comprehensive overview of the quality assurance mechanism for company-based training. The key objective of this research was to support greater transparency between Member States. An additional driving force was to support the increased international interest in Germany's work-based learning in recent years. One of the key principles in the quality assurance of Germany's company-based training is the multi-level system (Figure 1) which shows the three elements of quality assurance in company-based learning. There are different responsibilities at the state/system level; the intermediate level of employers' organisations; and individual companies.

This research led to the publication of *Quality assurance of company based training in the dual system in Germany* [5]. This brochure was designed for an international audience as well as German stakeholders. The ongoing demand for the German version of the brochure indicates that the German stakeholders and employers see the benefit of presenting an overarching summary and analysis of the system. From an international perspective, there have been requests for the brochure to be translated into Romanian, Spanish, Russian and Mongolian.

[5] Free printed copies of the brochure can be ordered at: https://www.bibb.de/veroeffentlichungen/de/publication/show/8548
If you press "In den Warenkorb" you can adjust the number of copies that you want.

Figure 1



EQAVET reaches beyond the EU!

An article by Elizabeth Watters, European Training Foundation

The EU's *Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET)* has relevance for countries outside the EU, not only for EU Candidate Countries but also for countries that have special relationships with the EU. EQAVET offers a framework for countries to locate their quality assurance efforts and interrogate their policies afresh.

It also enables countries to gauge the alignment of their quality assurance policy with that of the EU. Moreover, they can use the EQAVET-related support resources and good practices to help them to speed up their national reform processes[2].

THE ETF FORUM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET

The European Training Foundation (ETF) launched its ***Forum for Quality Assurance in VET*** in 2017. The ***Forum*** brings together ministries and national-level institutions, with a VET quality assurance mandate, in sixteen EU partner countries in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean[3], South-Eastern Europe[4] and Turkey. ***Forum*** members collaborate to improve quality assurance by pooling their knowledge and know-how, monitoring and reporting on national developments, engaging in joint projects and disseminating good examples of policy and practice. The ***Forum*** is inspired by EQAVET and the EQAVET framework serves as a guiding instrument.

[2] Within the EU, EQARF is supported by the EQAVET Secretariat and Network

[3] **Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*** this designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the EU Member States on this issue and Tunisia

[4] **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*** (*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of independence), Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia

ETF organised the second annual meeting of the ***Forum*** in July 2018 with the participation of the EQAVET Secretariat and National Reference Points for Austria, Estonia, Ireland and Wales/United Kingdom. Throughout the meeting the EQAVET experts played the role of critical friends and contributed actively to workshops, panel sessions and group discussions.

Monitoring and reporting on national developments is a core activity of the ***Forum***. Members maintain a knowledge base containing information on the 'status quo' of VET quality assurance in their respective countries.

During the meeting, the ***Forum*** members identified quality assurance mechanisms in key thematic areas that worked well, with potential for adaptation, and those that need to be improved. The EQAVET experts highlighted issues which are seen as challenging to EU Member States.

The ***Forum*** makes good use of the indicators that form part of EQAVET. The ETF's online indicator-mapping instrument supports the work of the ***Forum*** by collecting information on the understanding, coverage and use of the indicators.
The mapping instrument also collects information on the characteristics of the data which is collected. The ***Forum*** uses the indicators as the basis for developing innovative responses to priority needs for quality assurance reform in the member countries.

Peer learning is central to the methodology of implementing the ***Forum's*** objectives and work plan. *The Peer Visit Guidance and Training Manual*, developed in co-operation with *ARQA-VET*, is a Forum capacity-building tool that aims to ensure meaningful learning through peer visits. The ***Forum*** tested the methodology in the two peer visits in Turkey and Jordan in 2018.

These visits focussed on quality assurance and work based learning and provider/programme accreditation.

Self-evaluation by the ***Forum's*** member institutions has focused on assessing the extent to which they are performing the agreed roles and activities. The exercise has provided valuable feedback on the implementation of the ***Forum's*** work plan, particularly on the role of each member as a ***Forum*** advocate /champion in their national context. In the words of the members, the ***Forum's*** 'added value' includes its potential to:

- reinforce the concept that quality assurance is an ongoing process and not a one-off event;
- help members to inter-connect and evolve their VET quality assurance measures and aim for a more coherent, holistic, systemic and systematic approach;
- nurture/build capacities in effective stakeholder engagement, networking and collaboration;
- strengthen the quality culture in their countries;
- give hope for more responsive and effective VET systems with better outcomes for youth.

Forum members warmly welcomed the invitation extended to them by the EQAVET Secretariat on behalf of the European Commission to participate in the EQAVET ***Forum*** in Vienna during the Austrian Presidency of the European Union in November 2018.

Events

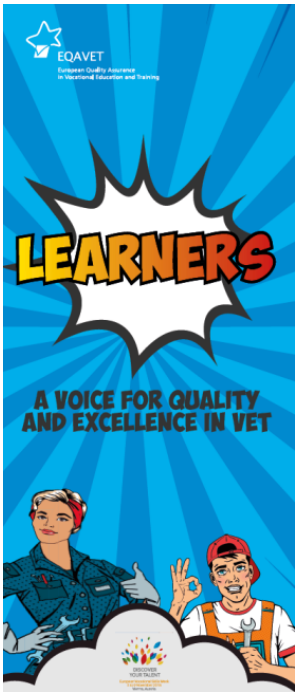
The EQAVET Secretariat, in partnership with the National Institute for Education (NÚV) in the Czech Republic, organised a peer learning activity (PLA) in October 2018. This PLA looked at efficient ways of involving the teachers, trainers and learners in the four stages of the quality cycle (planning, implementing, evaluating the outcomes and reviewing VET programmes) in line with relevant EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators. The PLA drew on the experiences of three Member States (CZ, RO and NL) who have involved these key stakeholders in their quality assurance processes.

The PLA included a study visit to the SOU Gastronomie - Vocational & Technical School of Prague.

The presentations and materials from the PLA are available at: www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/peer-learning-activities/Involving-teachers-and-trainers-in-the-QA-processe

In May 2018, the Italian National Reference Point organised a PLA to look at using Peer Review as a way to support quality assurance. The PLA included a visit to a VET provider (CIOFS-FP: a community college in Rome. http://www.ciofs-fp.org/) and drew on the experiences of Italy, Finland, Romania and Greece.

3rd EQAVET Forum – 6-7 November 2018, Vienna 'Learners – a voice for quality and excellence in VET'



More than 100 participants from 40 countries attended the EQAVET Annual Forum in Vienna. The Forum, organised by the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat with the support of the Austrian National Reference Point (ARQA-VET) was part of the European Vocational Skills Week 2018. The discussions focused on the voice of learners and the importance of their role in strengthening the quality of VET. The Forum was an opportunity to discuss the experiences of current and former VET learners from AT, FI, RO and UK (Wales); and the ways in which providers and the national systems in these countries and the NL support and encourage learners to participate in quality assurance processes.

Learners presented their experiences of VET; described their motivation for taking a VET programme; and explained how they are encouraged to contribute to improvements in the quality of provision. Their stories illustrated the many ways in which VET provision benefits from the learners' perspective and how this can contribute to quality assurance processes. The learners' experiences were inspiring and reminded the Forum participants that the learners are the customers in all VET provision.

To complement the learners' voices, teachers, representatives from the European social partners[6] and the European students' union organisation (OBESSU) highlighted the benefits of involving learners in quality assuring their programmes.

The final session of the forum looked at VET graduate tracking[7] and the lessons that have already been learnt through one Erasmus+ project (Tracktion).

[6] UEAPME (which has now been renamed as SMR united - https://smeunited.eu/en and the European Trade Union Confederation - ETUC (https://www.etuc.org/en)

[7] Council Recommendation on graduate tracking https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0249

Events

The Forum was organised into panel sessions which focused on:

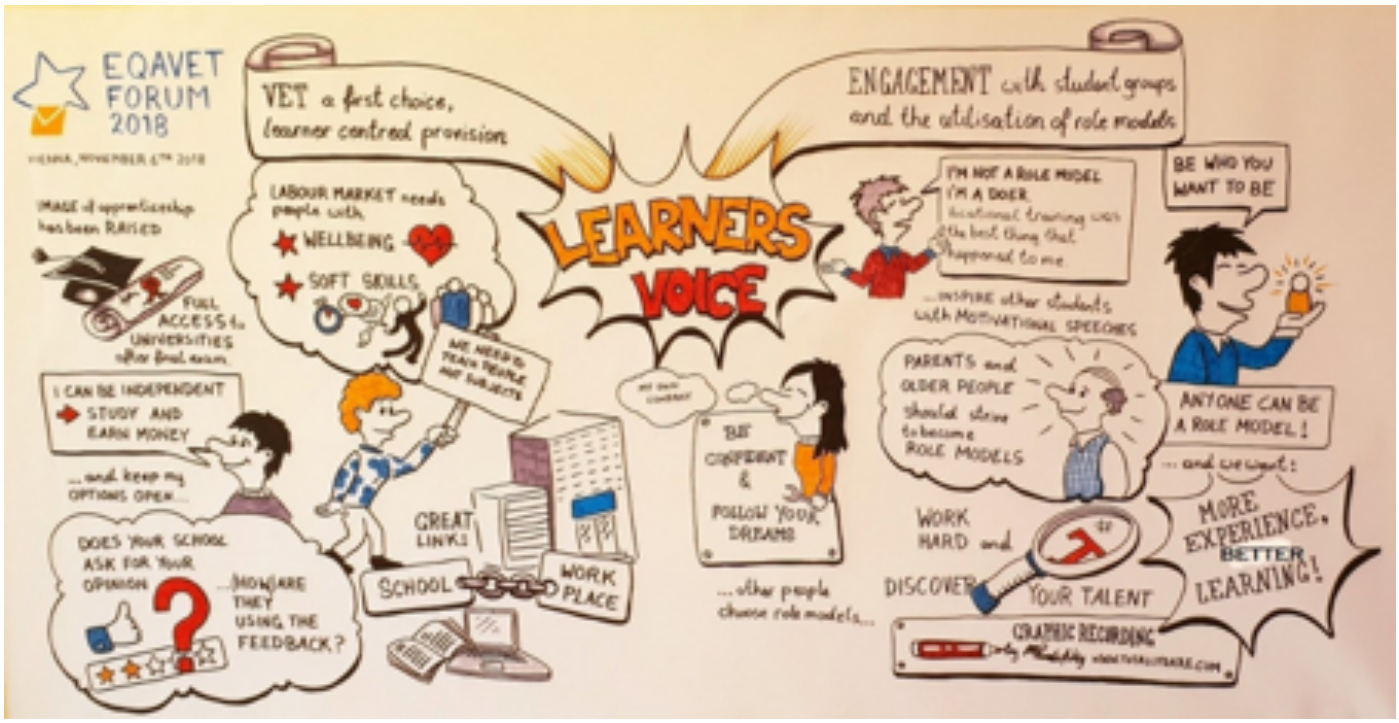
- VET as a first choice with learner centred provision;
- engagement with student groups and the utilisation of role models;
- designing and delivering work-based learning – engagement with learners;
- tracking VET graduates – benefits and challenges of developing a common approach to tracking VET graduates.

Key messages arising from the discussions at the Forum:

- current and former learners are key partners in the quality assurance processes; and their voice should percolate into the actions for improvement at all levels.
- the value of moving towards 'teaching people rather than subjects'. This helps education and training systems to meet the individual needs of learners;
- agreement on the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the need to ensure the wellbeing and mental health of leaners;
- learners need effective career guidance;
- learners contribute to innovation; which supports the need for VET provision to keep pace with the increasing global and digital world;
- education and training is becoming more 'demand driven' and is being influenced by the learning outcomes approach;
- data and information play an important role in improving the quality of VET provision. EQAVET national reference points should help providers to utilise data for improvement actions;
- VET is the first choice for learners in many countries. The value of VET will continue to improve as more learners tell stories of their success and explain why they chose to complete an initial VET programme;
- the challenge for VET providers and systems is to move from learners having ad-hoc opportunities to comment on quality to a situation where the established systems enable all learners to engage in strengthening the quality of their VET programmes;
- the importance of combining administrative data with survey data to create effective tracking systems.

During the Forum the graphic artist Eva Rudofsky illustrated the emerging key issues raised by participants and their discussions. You can see this work here:

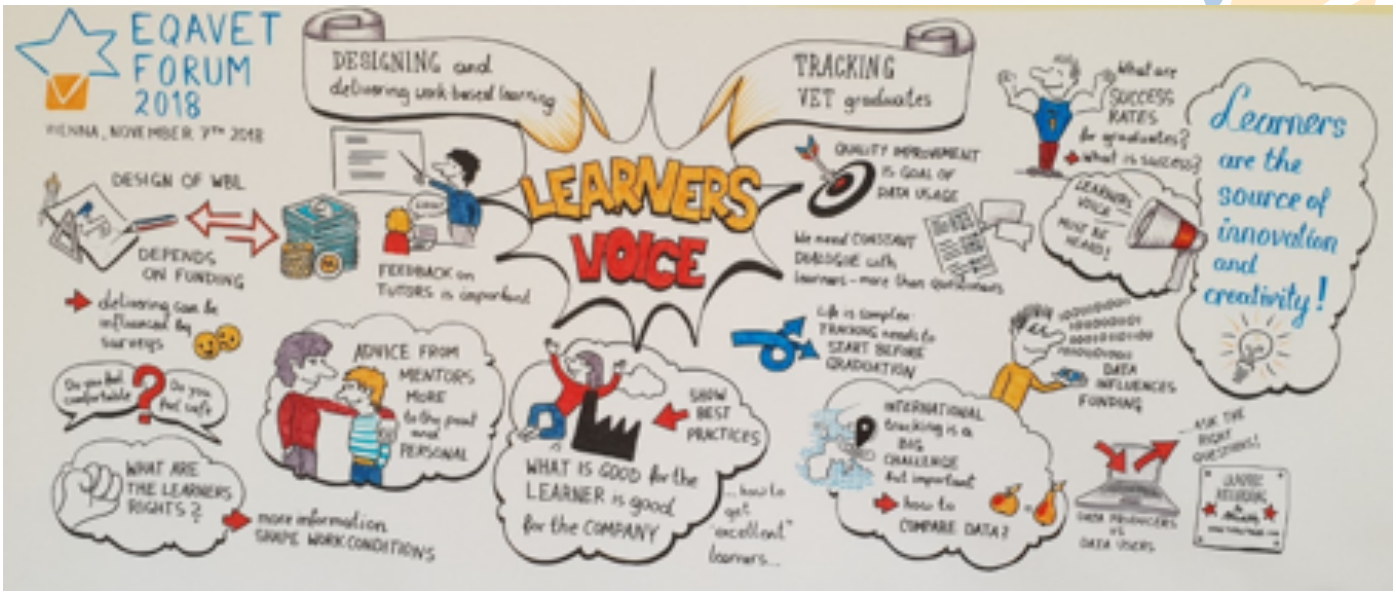
Day 1:



[8] The 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights) includes principle 1 which refers to 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.'

Events

Day 2:



Eva Rudofsky, Totally Dare (office@totallydare.com)

The Forum was held in the Wassermanngasse Tourism School in Vienna and participants enjoyed a dinner prepared by learners at the Modul Vienna School.

Full details of the EQAVET Forum, including presentations and other materials are available on the EQAVET website at https://www.eqavet.eu/

- EQAVET's Forum will take place in Finland on 16 October, 2019
- EQAVET's next Annual Network Meeting will be held in Bucharest on 13 and 14 June 2019.

PLA organised by the Finnish NRP on tracking graduates systems

In October 2018, the Finnish National Agency for Education organised a two-day peer learning activity (PLA) for colleagues from EL, IT, RO and SI, This included presentations from colleagues from the National Agency and VET providers in Finland. In addition there were short presentations from three other countries – EL, IT and RO. The PLA focused on tracking systems and how they could be used to support improvements in the quality of VET provision.

Finland's tracking system, introduced in 2018, is based on legislation and has the following characteristics:

- it uses real-time information and VET providers are required to regularly update their data on individual learners e.g. each time a learner completes a unit in their individual learning plan, or the learner changes their individual learning plan etc.;
- it is based on individualised data (not cohort data) and there is automatic alignment between different data-bases through a national data warehousing system;
- non-personal information from the tracking system is publicly available;
- the VET providers are motivated to provide the data to enhance their reputation and maximise their income (from 2020, 25% of their budget is dependent on the outcomes of their provision);
- there is a strong culture of learners providing data on satisfaction and employment etc. The system uses on-line questionnaires and learners expect providers to make changes in response to their feedback.

The PLA included a visit to an outreach centre which offers a full range of services for young people up to the age of 30. The centre's focus is employment and education but they also provide services covering health, personal care, social support etc.

There were presentations from staff working in five different VET providers. The PLA participants visited:

- Amiedu[9] (which focused on continuing VET for adults). The principal explained how they used the national tracking system and their institution's data (including comparative data) to improve the quality of their provision;
- Mercuria Business College[10].The quality manager and principal discussed the use of training plans which enabled learners, guided and supported by VET teachers, to design individualised programmes. This included an opportunity to examine how these plans worked in practice; how the teachers' pedagogy had changed to focus on supporting learning rather than teaching knowledge; and how the school used data from the tracking system to improve the quality of provision.

The final part of the PLA looked at how Finland predicts its future skills needs and demand for labour. Colleagues from the National Agency explained how this information is used to inform the design and re-design of VET qualifications.

The PLA's participants agreed on the following conclusions:

- it is important to be clear about:
  - ✓ the purpose of a tracking system;
  - ✓ the motivation of each participant and user of the system;
  - ✓ how the data will be used;
  - ✓ the data security issues (particularly when tracking is based on individualised data);
- there are significant technical challenges associated with data alignment and merger;
- tracking systems are expensive to design and operate: the benefits need to exceed the cost;
- a tracking system may show some initial VET qualifications do not lead to learner employment (e.g. in the arts or humanities areas) and this could encourage VET providers to withdraw these programmes;
- real-time, individualised tracking systems help national authorities to monitor what is happening in each VET provider and at the system level.

[9] https://www.amiedu.fi/in-english/

[10] https://www.mercuria.fi/en/

What's new?

The graduate tracking group

The European Commission has established an expert group to support the graduate tracking recommendation[11]. The first meeting, organised by the Directorate-general for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, took place on 8 October 2018 in Brussels. The EQAVET Secretariat is represented in this group which plans to:

- work across higher education and VET;
- focus on qualifications at EQF Level 4 and above;
- consider the use of administrative and survey data;
- consider policy and implementation issues.

The second meeting of the group is due to take place in February 2019. This will provide the opportunity to finalise the group's mandate and agree the focus of the work.

Do qualification frameworks work?

Quality and Qualifications Ireland has published an independent Policy Impact Assessment on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The report's findings show that the NFQ has had a positive impact on the transparency and trust in qualifications, and on the mobility and employment opportunities for holders of qualifications. The report also notes these effects cannot be taken for granted and work needs to continue to keep the NFQ relevant to the world of qualifications and skills.

A summary of key findings is available here[12] .

More detailed information on the report is available on the QQI website here

[11] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0249

[12] https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/NFQ%20Review%20at%20a%20Glance.pdf

[13] https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Reviewing-the-NFQ.aspx

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European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

EQAVET Secretariat, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), 26 Denzille Lane, Dublin D02 P266, Ireland
T: 00353 1 905 8144 E: info@eqavet.eu W: www.eqavet.eu