



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).

This 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> <p>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</p> <p>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</p>	<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
<p>Indicator no. 5 is an output indicator which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) May assist in supporting employability, improving responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market and supporting adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups; b) May be used in the planning, evaluation and review phases of the quality cycle; c) May be used to monitoring accessibility and attractiveness of VET programmes by demonstrating relevance of VET programme to employment and/or higher education; d) May also be used for budgetary target setting. 	

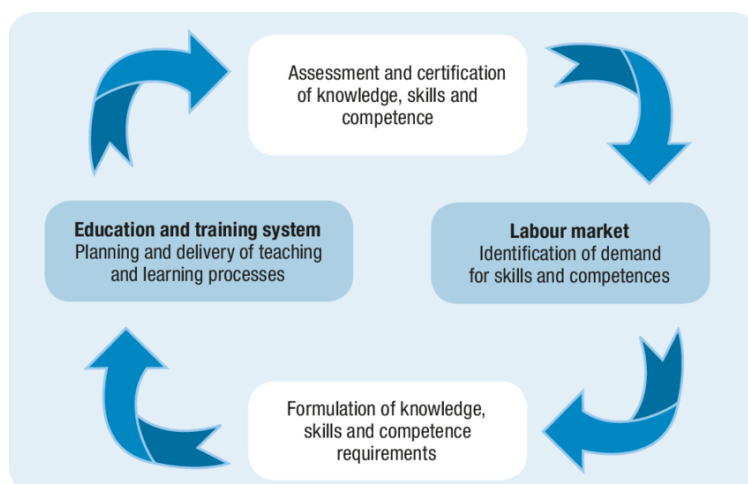
¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)

Indicator 6	Purpose of the Policy
<p>Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace</p> <p>a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria</p> <p>b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences</p>	<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
<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.

1. 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 regional Quality Network in **Italy** was set up to observe, measure and monitor the VET training courses impact on the labour market and the correspondent feedback from employers and institutions in providing the results towards VET providers and Schools. Indeed, the Regional VET supply and the employment policy can be continuously monitored and improved by adopting and using more appropriate indicators and interventions to be valid in the new programming of the ESF ROP- Regional Operational Programme (also in coherence with EQAVET and the National Quality Plan).

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 (CECOIA included) already worked with in the application of peer review in VET in Portugal within projects CECOIA 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.

2. 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“⁴. 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



⁴ Ibid.

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?
- 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.*⁵ 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 level⁶.

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:

- 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 methods⁷.

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

⁵ https://pmb.cereq.fr/doc_num.php?explnum_id=7200, p ii

⁶ 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)

⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5c71362f-a671-11ea-bb7a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>, p. 14

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
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 users⁸:

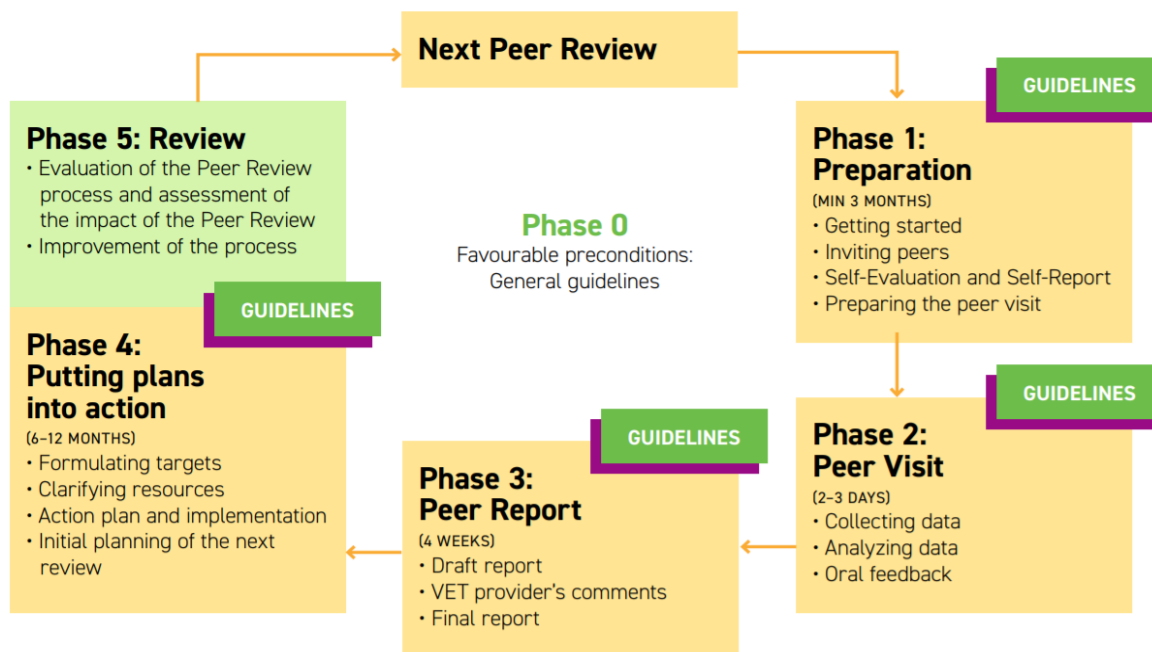
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Curricula | 9. Staff allocation, recruitment and development |
| 2. Learning and teaching | 10. Working conditions of staff |
| 3. Assessment | 11. External relations and internationalisation |
| 4. Learning | 12. Social participation and interactions |
| 5. Social environment and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

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:

⁸ 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>



Picture 1: Phases of the European Peer Review⁹

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,

⁹ 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

- 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.