



"Improving the quality of vocational education and training."

QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2018
Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education

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1. BASIS

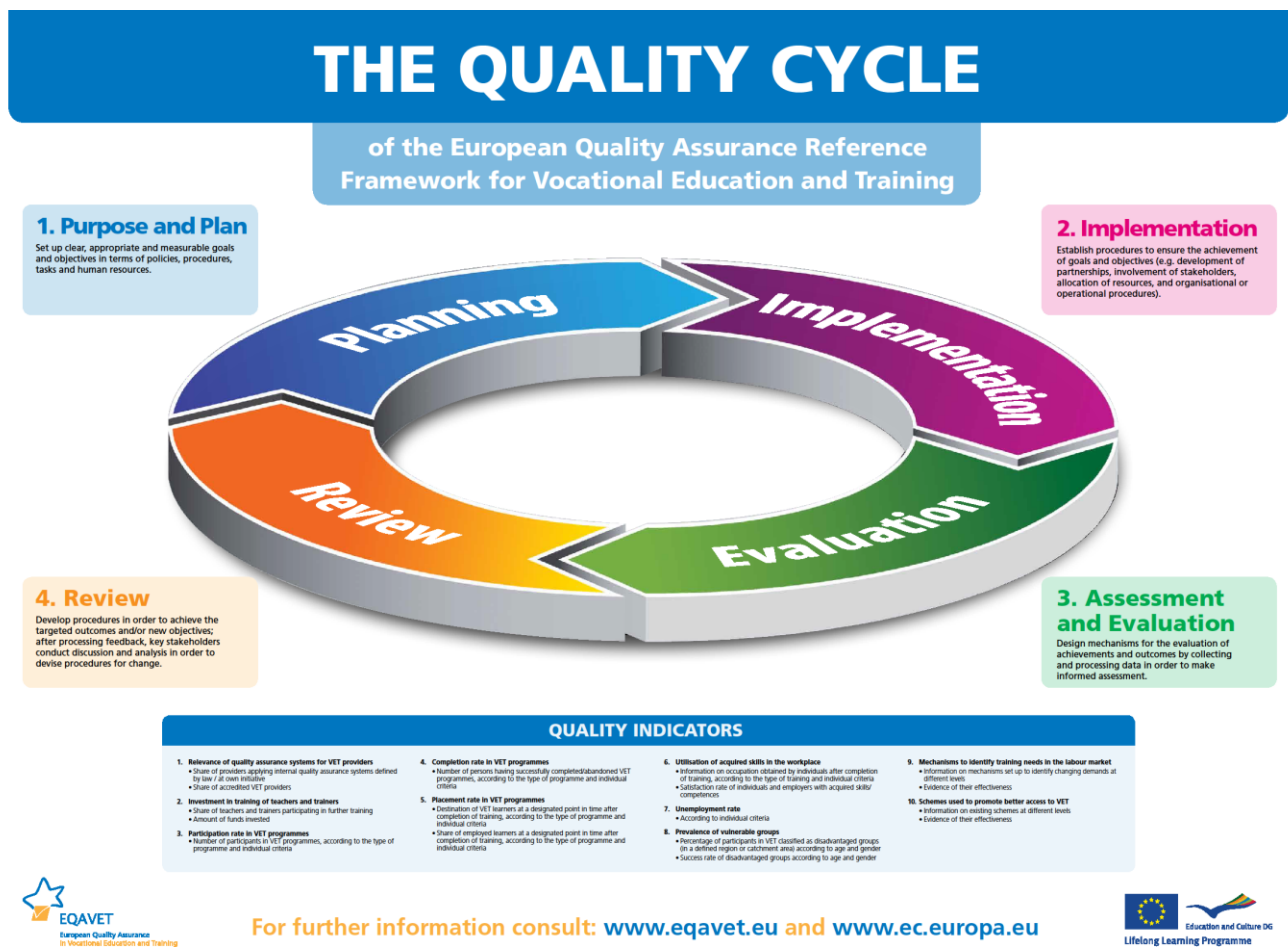
The quality assessment model of vocational education is based on the guidelines of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), the recommendations made in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) study “Assuring quality in vocational education and training. The role of accrediting VET providers”, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 and its implementation programme for Vocational Education.

1.1 European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) guidelines on VET quality assurance in the Member States.

EQAVET has prepared guidelines (reference framework) to advance vocational education and training and assure tools for quality management in VET. The framework is a shared basis for ensuring transparency, continuity and transferability of VET quality assurance across Europe and aiming at increasing mutual trust and the mobility of students and teachers.

EQAVET has defined common themes, the so-called building blocks, the VET systems and VET providers in Europe use to assure and develop the quality of learning and teaching. The building blocks are management culture, approaches to quality assurance, a culture of self-assessment, supporting staff training, use of data and feedback for improvements, the involvement of stakeholders. The framework defines ten key indicators which are used as a foundation for assessing the performance indicators and learning efficiency in the Estonian VET institutions.

Figure 1. Quality cycle in VET



Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) has been a member of the EQAVET network since 2009, participating in working groups and thus contributing to drafting the quality assurance principles and guidelines, as well as sharing experiences with member states about the functioning and development of internal and external evaluation of VET.

The EQAVET website gives an overview of the quality assurance system in Estonian vocational education and examples of its application in our VET.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) survey “Assuring quality in vocational education and training. The role of accrediting VET providers.” (Cedefop, 2011) highlights the similarities and differences in the approaches of member states to quality assessment of VET, including accreditation. While the objectives, methodology and procedures for quality assurance or accreditation largely vary from one country to another, the internal evaluation has or is about to become a focal process in quality assurance, having its effectiveness evaluated through the external evaluation. In the study, researchers underline that quality assessment systems should more

than before facilitate identifying the internal strengths and weaknesses, and the creation of a continuous culture of improvements. The study process and the needs of students should be at the centre of attention.

Regarding lifelong learning, the experts suggest strengthening cooperation between those responsible for the external evaluation of vocational and higher education, in order to define common standards and criteria for a holistic and coherent evaluation framework at all levels of education system.

This conceptual framework for evaluating the quality of vocational education complies with the EQAVET guidelines and the recommendations of the Cedefop experts. Quality assessment of vocational education as an external evaluation conducted by independent evaluators on the basis of internal evaluation is a part of the VET quality assurance process.

1.2 Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (ELLS) 2020, or in other words education strategy sets five strategic objectives for the next years and measures for achieving them.

- **A change in the approach to learning**

The quality assessment of vocational education focuses on the implementation of a concept of learning that supports the progress of students, their self-actualisation and develops key competencies.

- **Competent and motivated teachers and school leaders**

The assessment focuses on whether teachers have the necessary qualifications, their professional development, the results of teaching and development activities.

- **Concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market**

The assessment focuses on employer participation in developing study programme and designing the learning processes as well as on whether feedback from employers and alumni is collected and analysed.

- **A digital focus in lifelong learning**

The assessment focuses on the extent to which teaching methods foster the development of digital culture and the teachers' professional development in digital technology.

- **Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning.**

The assessment focuses on how well the study programmes, including study programmes of in-service training, correspond to the needs of interest groups and how the study process takes the needs and unique features of students into account.

1.3 Vocational education programme 2016-2019

The programme supports the implementation of ELLS 2020 and maps the activities based on the primary development needs of the vocational education system to guarantee a better match with the needs of the labour market, ensure the quality of VET and decrease early school leaving. External evaluation is a part of VET quality assurance to support VET institutions in both self-evaluations as well as in change management depending on the development needs.

Development working group and expert group (Annex 1) consisting of partners of vocational education and stakeholders in accreditation / quality assessment, i.e. institutions providing vocational education, experts and employer representatives analysed the current model of accreditation and feedback from the stakeholders, to harmonise the principles, criteria and procedures for quality assurance with the objectives set in the ELLS 2020.

2. THE OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES, AREAS OF ASSESSMENT AND CRITERIA FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

2.1 Objective

The objective of the quality assessment of vocational education is to foster the development of learning-oriented school culture and to increase the reliability of vocational education.

Quality assessment of vocational education provides an opportunity:

- For the school to get feedback about the quality of the study process and recommendations to develop it and to use the results of an independent external evaluation for the school's strategic management.
- To inform interested groups (learners, labour market, state, the society in general) about how well vocational education meets the national demands, objectives of development plans, labour market needs and expectations of the learners.

2.2 Principles

The following principles have been taken into account in reviewing the criteria and procedures for the quality assessment of vocational education:

1. Quality assessment is a formative assessment where the main interested party and beneficiary is the institution providing vocational education;
2. To highlight the nature of formative assessment, the assessment decision (the term for next assessment) is not linked to the right to provide instruction (for details see point 2.4 of the conceptual framework);
3. Assessment committee drafts an assessment report, stating the school's strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations which first and foremost is a feedback for the school, but also gives insight for the school holder and the society in general;
4. In planning quality assessment, ISCED-F 2013 fields of education and training will be used as the assessment unit as of 2019;
5. The setup of the quality assessment is flexible (assessment units, the composition of the committees, timeline), based on the unique features of the groups of programmes and where possible, the needs and preferences of the schools are taken into consideration.

The application of principles 1, 2, 4 and 5 requires changes in the Vocational Education Institutions Act, the standard of vocational education and in the conditions and procedure for accrediting formal education in VET. While the conditions and procedure for accrediting vocational education can be changed more quickly (thus allowing the principles 4 and 5 to be applied at least partly), amending the Act and the standard could take at least a year.

The transition to new principles should take place according to the following timeline:

1. As of 1 January 2017, changes in the conditions and procedures for the accreditation of formal education in VET have been enforced, allowing for the application of principle 5;
2. 1 January - 31 December 2018 (or until the enforcement of the new conceptual framework) is a transition period during which similar groups of programmes are merged into one assessment group and accredited, but the vocational education assessment council takes the accreditation decisions on the basis of the ISCED-F 2013 groups of programmes. During the transition period the Ministry of Education and Research will extend the right to provide instruction in the ISCED-F 2013 group of programmes on the basis of accreditation decisions;
3. Once the amended Vocational Education Institutions Act and the standard of vocational education are in force, the assessment council will take the decisions by the groups of programmes under the field of education and training. Assessment decisions are not linked to granting the right to provide instruction or extending it. When the amended Act is enforced, the right to provide instruction is considered to be without a term in all groups of programmes which are accredited in the school for six years. Groups of programmes accredited for three years undergo a re-assessment. After conducting the re-assessment, a group of programmes can receive the right to provide instruction without a term and to undergo quality assessments in the future. The number of re-assessments is limited by law, and if a group of programmes fails to receive the right to provide instruction without a term, the school loses the right to provide instruction in this group of programmes because of the inability to solve the problems identified during the assessment.

2.3 Assessment unit in quality assessment

The shift to ISCED-F 2013 classification increased the number of groups of programmes in vocational education, whereas the content in many of them is quite similar, thus making a separate assessment unreasonably resource intensive. For example, the ICT group of programmes has been split into three separate groups of programmes under the new classification, while health and social services are now five separate groups of programmes. Based on the experience in accrediting groups of programmes and the feedback from the stakeholders, it would be reasonable to use ISCED-F 2013 fields of education and training as an assessment unit.

2.4 Quality assessment and granting the initial right to provide instruction

The conceptual framework of quality assessment of VET is based on the principle of formative assessment which can be implemented if the link between the results of the quality assessment and the right to provide studies in the group of programmes no longer exists. Quality assessment influences the right to provide instruction only if the assessment reveals significant non-compliance in some groups of programmes in the field of education and training and the Ministry of Education

and Research initiates supervisory proceedings and, where necessary, the right to provide instruction in this group of programmes is revoked.

2.4.1 Granting the right to provide instruction in a new group of programmes

- The school submits an application and the materials needed to commence the proceedings to the Ministry of Education and Research.
- The Ministry of Education and Research establishes whether the materials comply with the requirements set out in the legal acts and commissions an initial assessment of the group of programmes from EKKA on the basis of the regulation laid down by the vocational education assessment council. The vocational education assessment council makes one of the following proposals to the Minister for Education and Research based on the assessment report:
 - a) to grant the school the right to provide instruction without a term;
 - b) to grant the right to provide instruction for three years;
 - c) not to grant the right to provide instruction.
- If the group of programmes receives the right to provide instruction without a term, it will undergo regular quality assessments in the future, taking place at least once every six years. The result of the quality assessment is not linked to the right to provide instruction. Unlinking quality assessment from the right to provide instruction means that the assessment focuses more on the school's development. A shorter term of assessment does not necessarily indicate non-compliance with national regulations but rather shows new development needs and opportunities.
- If a school receives the initial right to provide instruction for three years, a re-assessment will be conducted on the basis of the relevant regulation adopted by the vocational education assessment council. The vocational education assessment council makes one of the following proposals to the Minister for Research and Education based on the assessment report of the assessment committee:
 - a) to grant the school the right to provide instruction without a term;
 - b) to grant the right to provide instruction for three years;
 - c) not to grant the right to provide instruction.

The Minister for Education and Research is entitled to revoke the right to provide instruction if EKKA vocational education assessment council makes a recommendation for the third time to grant the right to provide instruction in that group of programmes for three years.

- If a group of programmes has been granted the right to provide instruction without a term, a regular quality assessment will take place at least once in every six years, targeted at fostering the development of learning-oriented school culture and improving the reliability of vocational education.

- Quality assessment of vocational education is conducted according to a timeline adopted by EKKA and accepted by educational institutions and the Ministry of Education and Research. The assessment decisions are taken by the vocational education assessment council of EKKA. The results of the quality assessment are used by the schools' management and by the Ministry of Education and Research for policymaking. Quality assessment of vocational education provides an opportunity:
 - for the school to get feedback about the quality of the teaching and education process and recommendations for its development; the results of an independent external evaluation can also be used for the school's strategic management.
 - To inform interested groups (learners, labour market, state, the society in general) about how well vocational education meets the national demands, objectives of development plans, labour market needs and expectations of the learners.

2.4.2 Right to provide instruction in the groups of programmes accredited between 2011 to 2018 and where the right to provide instruction has been extended

- After the entry into force of the amended Act, all groups of programmes accredited for six years are considered to hold the right to provide instruction without a term. The quality of such groups of programmes will be assessed at least once every six years.
- If a group of programmes has been accredited for three years, the right to provide instruction depends on the results of the re-assessment. It means that if after the re-assessment a group of programmes receives the right to provide instruction without a term, the quality will be regularly assessed at least once in every six years. Also, if, as a result of the re-assessment, the group of programmes receives the right to provide instruction for three years, the group of programmes will have to undergo another re-assessment. If the assessment council of EKKA proposes to grant the right to provide instruction for three years, for the third time, the Minister for Education and Research is entitled to revoke the right to provide instruction.

2.5 The composition and forming of assessment council

The clauses 1-3 of subsection 6 and subsection 7 of section 13 of the Vocational Education Institutions Act shall be amended to ensure that the assessment process not only is but also seems independent.

- Forming the vocational education assessment council shall be a task for the council of the foundation responsible for quality assessment of vocational education.

- The council of the foundation responsible for quality assessment of vocational education approves the rules and procedures for the forming of vocational education assessment council, which means that the relevant text in the legislation can be less detailed.
- The amendments made in the Vocational Education Institutions Act stipulate that no representatives of the school holders of the schools under assessment nor any representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research should belong to the vocational education assessment council. Assessment decisions and assessment reports are independent expert assessments that the Ministry of Education and Research as a policymaker in the field of vocational education can use for taking evidence-based management decisions.
- An election cycle of three years should be defined in the Act for the assessment council.
- The vocational education assessment council shall consist of 13 members, including at least six representatives of the labour market and one representative of students.
- There should be at least one expert from each field of education where vocational training is provided in the assessment council.
- Employers' associations, registered professional and occupational associations, institutions providing vocational education and the body of chairs of professional councils can set up candidates to the vocational education assessment council. Substantive qualification requirements shall be established for the members of the assessment council, whereas there should be less formal requirements and limitations.

2.6 Areas and criteria for assessment

Quality assessment of vocational education focuses on the studies.

The studies are assessed in the following areas:

- 1. Study programme and its development**
- 2. Learning and teaching**
- 3. Teachers**

All these areas have specific assessment criteria.

The following criteria are used in assessing the study programme and its development:

1. Study programme development is targeted, systematic and managed; study programmes are prepared and developed keeping in mind the educational needs of learners and the labour market;
2. The studies are planned taking into account the uniqueness of the learners, teaching content and methods, as well as assessment criteria and methods, support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies.

The following criteria are used in assessing learning and teaching:

1. Students' choice of specialisation is supported;
2. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes;
3. The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study, and it supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes;
4. The teaching content, methodology and evaluation, including for practical work and training, is based on the learning outcomes;
5. Student support services are in place and available for students.

The following criteria are used in teacher¹ assessment:

1. Study programmes have teachers with relevant qualification, including practitioners and competent practical training supervisors; the volume of work of teachers and job positions are pre-planned;
2. Professional and occupational development of teachers is adapted to the study programmes, the needs of learners, feedback from the stakeholders and self-analysis.

The following performance indicators of teaching and learning are used in quality assessment:

1. Trends in admission (including in-service training);

¹ For the conceptual framework, all employees in the field of schooling and education are referred to as teachers (including supervisors of practical work, practical training supervisors at schools and other.)

2. Trends in the share of early leavers;
3. Trends in the share of graduates;
4. Trends in the employment rate of alumni, including the share of those continuing in education and training;
5. Trends in passing the vocational examination;
6. Trends in student satisfaction;
7. Other indicators, including learning mobility, taking part in competitions and contests.

2.7 The decision of the assessment council

The vocational education assessment council reaches the assessment decision on the basis of the self-analysis report of the group of programmes, the report of the assessment committee, any remarks received from the school by the set deadline and if necessary any other materials submitted at the request of the assessment council.

Assessment council takes a decision, defining the term for the next quality assessment of the group of programmes:

- The next quality assessment shall take place after six years if the teaching and education in the group of programmes comply with the quality assessment criteria and legislation.
- The assessment council may, if justified, set a secondary condition for the six-year accreditation, should any specific non-compliance with legislation or quality assessment criteria exist for the group of programmes, which the council finds can be removed over the course of two years. The school submits a report to the assessment council by the deadline set by the assessment council about fulfilling the secondary condition. If the assessment council finds that the secondary condition is not met, the assessment council may ask the school to submit additional information, to extend the deadline for fulfilling the secondary condition, or to change the assessment decision.
- The next quality assessment shall take place after three years if the teaching and education in the group of programmes do not comply with the legislation or the criteria of quality assessment.
- The assessment council informs the Ministry of Education and Research, if necessary, about any significant non-compliances with legislation or quality assessment criteria.
- If serious non-compliance with legislation or quality assessment criteria exists in the group of programmes, the Minister for Education and Research can initiate the process to revoke the right to provide instruction in this particular group of programmes.

Annex 1. Members of the quality assessment development working group

1. Rita Siilivask – representative of the Ministry of Education and Research, member of the EQAVET network
2. Hannes Mets – representative of the Estonian Association for Advancement of Vocational Education
3. Ülle Nõmmiste – representative of Innove
4. Urve Mets – representative of the Estonian Qualification Authority
5. Sirje Rekkor – an expert on teaching and education, consultant to the school teams, member of the EQAVET working group
6. Eduard Brindfeldt – an expert on teaching and education
7. Tõnu Lelumees – employers’ representative
8. Aime Vilgas – employers’ representative
9. Kalle Toom – a member of the concept development working group of state recognition system, member of the EQAVET network

Members of the quality assessment expert group

1. Sirje Rekkor – an expert on teaching and education, consultant to the school teams, member of the EQAVET working group, member of the development working group
2. Kalle Toom – a member of the concept development working group of state recognition system, member of the EQAVET network, member of development working group
3. Tiina Plukk – an expert on schooling and education, consultant to the school teams, Head of Studies at Tallinn School of Service (*Tallinna Teeninduskool*)
4. Kaidi Holm – expert of the concept development working group on accreditation 2009-2010, an expert on teaching and education, consultant to school teams
5. Liivi Raudsepp – Tartu Kutsehariduskeskuse Head of Studies at Tartu Vocational Education Centre; Tartu VEC has been accredited since 2011, all 16 groups of programmes have full accreditation

Heli Mattisen, Marge Kroonmäe, Reet Taimsoo, Lagle Zobel and Hillar Bauman from EKKA took part in the development and expert working group.

The conceptual framework for evaluating the quality of vocational education was prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Research. EKKA has introduced the conceptual framework to the vocational education assessment council, management board of the Estonian

Association for Advancement of Vocational Education, the Estonian Employers' Confederation and vocational education institutions. The suggestions by the stakeholders have been taken into account in drafting the quality assessment principles and in specifying the assessment areas and criteria.

Annex 2. Summary of the stakeholder feedback to the current accreditation process

- Accreditation / external evaluation should be more than just formative feedback.
- Qualitative measurements should be used for assessing the implementation of new study programmes. Quantitative evaluation does not give us anything.
- There should not be so many general questions about the school in the report, but a greater focus on the group of programmes. For example, it could be structured by areas.
- The emphasis should be on the crucial issues that schools need help with and good practices, such as integration, assessment of the acquisition of key competencies.
- In case of a 6-year accreditation, the school could submit interim reviews to EKKA, e.g. about implementing the recommendations/improvements suggested by the assessment committee.
- Operational plans and their implementation could be introduced for the new accreditation period; to see how well the process complies with the operational plan; outcomes assessment. There should be less focus on the general educational process.
- We do not think a common assessment at school would be wise at the moment since the groups of programmes are so different and cannot be combined.
- The accreditation results, including the report, should be available on the school's website.
- The report should include the integration of groups of programmes. Integration is covered under both HR development and study process. There are also other repetitions which could be eliminated. The structure of the report should be reviewed; it should be made more compact.
- Some groups of programmes could be evaluated together, such as catering and service, logistics and transport, since they are quite intertwined and could be evaluated together. Also, a separate evaluation "fragments the group of programmes". It would be worth considering if any of the school's groups of programmes could be combined.
- It would be a good idea if the same committee could assess a particular group of programmes throughout the accreditation period.
- An international committee is good, but international experts might not understand our system. Sharing experiences could bring even more value. Involving external experts would be a good idea – having someone from a similar environment to share their knowledge with the school (e.g. About teaching SEN students).

- The schools could compile the general part of the report once a year (harmonised form), e.g. for each academic year, followed by reports on groups of programmes highlighting the differences.
- Accreditation could consist of interim reviews, consultations (a few years), assessment.

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