



EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2026

11-12 June 2026, Nicosia, Cyprus

Flash Report

The EQAVET Annual Network meetings bring together EU country representatives in charge of quality assurance in VET, EQAVET National Reference Points representatives, as well as staff members of the European Commission, European Training Foundation, Cedefop, ETUC and thematic experts. The Annual Network Meeting 2026 was attended by 54 participants¹ from 33 countries (25 EU Member States and 8 non-EU countries).

The EQAVET Annual Network Meeting (ANM) 2026 took place in Nicosia, Cyprus and was opened by **Koen Bois d'Enghien of the European Commission (DG EMPL)**, who situated the meeting in the context of wider EU skills policy, notably the implementation of the Union of Skills. The Herring Declaration was highlighted as a milestone, alongside an update on the forthcoming European VET strategy. DG EMPL also underlined the priority of basic skills in VET and the role of EQAVET NRPs related to this topic. The introduction further emphasised the importance of the meeting for exchange, the added value of EQAVET peer reviews as well as the preparation for the next EQAVET NRP projects starting in September 2026 which offer a valuable opportunity to build synergies between NRPs.

Pambos Efstratiou, Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA) and **Andreas Georgoudes, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth in Cyprus** welcomed the participants on behalf of the host country. They highlighted that demographic changes, as well as the green and digital transitions, require VET systems to remain relevant and responsive in supporting citizens' participation in the labour market. They noted that basic skills in VET, citizenship education and graduate tracking would be among the key topics to be discussed over the two days. They also emphasised that the EQAVET Network provides an important platform for promoting quality in VET, as it strengthens the resilience of VET systems and fosters mutual learning, exchange of ideas and cooperation among countries.

Stelios Miliatis, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, provided an overview of the Cypriot VET system, highlighting key strengths such as progression opportunities to higher education, alongside challenges related to low participation, limited attractiveness and difficulties in engaging employers in work-based learning. Labour market trends point to persistent youth unemployment, skills mismatches and low participation in lifelong learning, driven by structural changes such as digital and green transitions. **Christos Djamias, Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA)** presented the central role played by the Human Resource Development Authority in addressing these challenges through targeted training schemes, labour market forecasting and support for the integration of unemployed individuals. Quality assurance is ensured through programme accreditation and monitoring mechanisms applied across training provision.

Policy update from the European Commission and EQAVET Secretariat report on work of the Network

Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG EMPL provided a policy update on the implementation of the [Union of Skills](#), noting that after one year, around two thirds of the actions are ongoing, with the remainder in preparation. Key initiatives highlighted included specific actions developed in the framework of the [STEM Education Strategic Plan](#), the [Action Plan on Basic Skills](#), the [Skills Guarantee Pilot](#) for workers, the roll-out of [Individual Learning Accounts](#) and the reinforced [Pact for Skills](#), confirming that skills remain a central EU priority.

The presentation outlined the three overarching objectives of the Union of Skills: empowering individuals to develop skills, supporting companies in finding the right talent, and ensuring that skills and qualifications are transparent and recognised. Looking ahead, upcoming initiatives for 2026 include the EU VET Strategy, the Skills Portability Initiative and a broader education package supporting actions such as basic skills, teachers and trainers as well as digital education. Governance developments were also presented, including the establishment of the European Skills Intelligence Observatory to provide data, foresight and early warning alerts on skills shortages, and the creation of the [EU Skills High-Level Board](#) bringing together education and training providers, businesses and social partners to inform EU policymaking. In addition, a new [EU-27 Recommendation on Human Capital](#), adopted in March 2026, aims to address skills shortages in strategic sectors and strengthen the role of skills in the European Semester.

EQAVET-specific updates covered the network's contribution to the Basic Skills Action Plan, the potential launch of a new working group on graduate tracking and key performance indicators (KPIs), and the preparation of the new grant agreements for EQAVET NRPs starting in September 2026.

The EQAVET Secretariat presented an overview the work programme since the last ANM in June 2025, including mutual learning activities (e.g. eight peer reviews and one peer learning activity), capacity-building activities (e.g.: Steering Committee meetings and the EQAVET survey 2025) and communication efforts across the Network (e.g. updates on the EQAVET website, newsletters and the migration of the virtual library). In particular, the results of the peer reviews highlighted very positive outcomes, with consistently high satisfaction scores across key indicators and a clear upward trend compared to previous years. Participants rated the overall method, outcomes and usefulness of the peer reviews highly, while support from the EQAVET Secretariat received the highest possible score from host countries. These findings confirm the strong added value of peer reviews as a key instrument for mutual learning, while also identifying areas for further improvement, such as strengthening peer selection and enhancing feedback tools.

Updates from the European Training Foundation and Cedefop

Mounir Baati, ETF, presented how the European Training Foundation supports partner countries in modernising quality assurance systems, drawing on the example of Egypt. He outlined the establishment and role of the national QA body (ETQAAN), responsible for setting standards, accreditation and system monitoring. ETF support has included reviewing accreditation standards through peer expertise from the EQAVET network, leading to refinements and alignment with EU practices, and introducing the use of EQAVET indicators for system performance assessment. The presentation also highlighted ETF's broader role in providing policy advice, knowledge and capacity-building to strengthen national QA systems.

George Kostakis, Cedefop, presented ongoing research on quality assurance in formal and non-formal certified CVET, which aims to map QA approaches, analyse arrangements and identify key enabling factors across a sample of 12 countries and three sectors. The study explores a complex and evolving CVET landscape characterised by new qualifications, micro-

credentials, diversified provision, changing governance and increased labour market pressures, including skills shortages and the growing role of funding mechanisms such as individual learning accounts in shaping QA. Early findings indicate that formal CVET relies mainly on regulatory and institutional QA mechanisms, while non-formal certified CVET is more influenced by funding conditions and recognition frameworks. The presentation also highlighted key factors for well-functioning systems, including stakeholder involvement, coherent qualifications frameworks and alignment with labour market needs, as well as trade-offs between relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and equity.

Citizenship education in VET

Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG EMPL presented recent developments on citizenship education in initial VET (IVET), highlighting its inclusion as part of basic skills and its growing relevance in the context of democratic resilience. The presentation emphasised that citizenship competences (encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes) can be both learned and practiced, and can be addressed not only through formal curricula but also through whole-school approaches. He also underlined the importance of political literacy and specialised, participatory pedagogies in IVET, while noting challenges such as on average lower levels of citizenship competences among VET learners and less systematic provision of citizenship education in VET compared to general secondary education. Finally, the presentation pointed to ongoing and upcoming policy developments, including a future EU competence framework on citizenship education and associated guidelines, as well as broader initiatives on citizenship education in VET (e.g. Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Developing a Culture of Democracy in Vocational Education and Training in the framework of the Council of Europe, the Final report of the CEDEFOP study or the International civic and citizenship education study) to strengthen democratic values amid increasing democratic backsliding.

George Kostakis, Cedefop, presented ongoing research on citizenship competence in IVET (2025–2027), which explores how citizenship education is integrated across diverse IVET systems in Europe and aims to inform policymaking through evidence from eight countries, including four pilot countries (CZ, DE, EE, IT, NL, NO, PT and RO). The study highlights that while citizenship education is widely present, it remains fragmented and unevenly implemented across schools and programmes, with flexible and participatory approaches acting as key enablers. Furthermore, gaps persist due to broadly defined policies, weak coordination and monitoring, and limited integration in workplace learning, pointing to the need for clearer frameworks and stronger indicators to support implementation.

The EQAVET National Reference Points' plans and projects for 2026-2029

Through interactive groups session, participants explored possible areas for collaboration between NRPs, including on graduate tracking and follow-up mechanisms, stakeholder and employer involvement, basic skills development, and quality assurance system development, implementation and standardisation.

Highlights from the work of the NRPs in the past year

Seven EQAVET NRPs presented national initiatives that they have recently completed:

Barbara Kelly, Ireland, presented Ireland's external quality assurance and work-based learning monitoring approach for Education and Training Boards (ETBs), highlighting a comprehensive review cycle launched in 2019 to strengthen quality culture across a diverse further education sector. The process combines internal self-assessment by providers and employers with external evaluation, supported by common quality standards, performance levels and an electronic monitoring platform. It emphasises reflection, evidence-based improvement and continuous follow-up through reporting and action plans, while aggregated data informs regional and national quality insights. Key challenges include limited employer

engagement in quality monitoring and resource constraints, underlining the need to balance robust quality assurance with feasible implementation for enterprises.

Carmen Musat, Romania, presented Romania's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Quality Monitoring Mechanism (AMCILM), developed to strengthen QA in VET through a comprehensive system combining self-assessment at provider level and external monitoring at county, regional and national levels. The mechanism is based on a structured set of quality criteria and indicators covering input, process, output and outcomes, supported by standardised tools, reporting and evidence collection. While it enhances transparency and consistency in monitoring WBL quality, key challenges remain, including limited engagement from companies, refusals of monitoring visits, and insufficient resources and awareness of the benefits of quality WBL.

Masha Reijerkerk, Netherlands, presented a study on blended learning in Dutch VET, exploring how hybrid approaches are implemented and supported through quality assurance. The findings show that blended learning is highly context-dependent and largely driven by institutional and teacher choices, with no single model in place, while face-to-face learning remains essential, particularly for practical skills and social interaction. Although the shift during COVID-19 led to initial adoption, practices have not been widely sustained, partly due to limited teacher capacity in digital pedagogy. The study highlights that blended learning can offer important benefits, such as flexibility, personalised learning and stronger links to professional practice, particularly for more independent or advanced learners, but requires strong pedagogical design, teacher support and QA beyond technology to be effective.

Rita Kask, Estonia, presented Estonia's reform of quality assurance in VET, highlighting a transition from programme-based external evaluation towards a more holistic, institution-level approach focused on whole-school quality and continuous improvement. The previous model, based on internal and external evaluations aligned with national standards, provided in-depth analysis of specific vocational fields but resulted in a fragmented view of school quality. The new ESF funded model, coordinated by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) and stakeholders, shifts to integrated institutional assessment, combining self-evaluation and external review to provide more comprehensive feedback, reduce administrative burden and better align with higher education accreditation practices.

Martina Kaňáková, Czech Republic, presented a Czech self-evaluation tool for practical instruction in IVET, developed to strengthen quality monitoring in line with the EQAVET framework and the national *Quality School* framework. The tool supports schools' autonomy by enabling internal self-assessment of practical training across five key areas (including conditions, staff and learning outcomes), combining school- and workplace-based learning. The initiative responds to gaps in regular monitoring by encouraging schools to collect evidence, reflect on quality and plan improvements over time, with results that can be shared internally and used for external evaluation. While schools appreciated the relevance of the criteria and increased trust following publication via the inspectorate, the process can be resource-intensive, making it more suitable for cyclical implementation (e.g. every two to four years) rather than annual monitoring.

Lubica Gállová, Slovakia, presented the piloting peer review in Slovak VET schools (2024–2026), aimed at strengthening quality assurance through a full quality cycle centred on self-evaluation and continuous improvement. The approach combines standardised tools and guidelines across ten quality areas with strong capacity-building, including training of quality coordinators and awareness-raising among school staff. The pilot, implemented in selected schools with strong management commitment and coordination by national and regional stakeholders, supports structured reflection and collaboration between schools, while shifting the focus from external assessment to internal quality ownership.

Riikka Vacker, Finland and Marge Kroonmäe, Estonia, presented the joint EQAVET NRP project between **Croatia, Estonia, Finland and Slovenia** and its updated transnational peer review criteria for VET providers, designed as a quality assurance tool aligned with the EQAVET+ framework and supporting continuous improvement across 14 quality areas. The initiative places a strong emphasis on embedding sustainability as a core value within quality assurance systems and strengthening QA practices, including in CVET provision. The transnational peer review approach enables mutual learning, offering participating institutions new perspectives, motivation and opportunities for development through cross-country collaboration, while also reinforcing quality culture and institutional improvement. At the same time, it requires significant time and human resources, which remains a key challenge for providers. The project is entering a new phase with updated criteria and forthcoming publication of results, and is open to the participation of additional Member States, alongside continued peer learning and exchange through workshops and joint activities.

The trade unions' views on Quality Assurance in VET

Agnes Roman (ETUC and ETUCE) presented Trade unions' views on quality assurance in VET, highlighting the expectations of [workers' trade unions](#) (ETUC) and [teachers' trade unions](#) (ETUCE) for the upcoming VET Strategy, which should address quality in both IVET and CVET provision equally. She underlined that the crucial role of initial VET (IVET) is not only in providing basic skills but also in equipping learners with key competences necessary for both work and life. The presentation stressed that VET policies should treat education as a public good and should not be driven solely by short-term labour market needs. The importance of guidance in supporting informed educational choices and improving the attractiveness of IVET was also emphasised, alongside the role of quality jobs and progression opportunities after graduation.

The intervention also addressed ongoing and upcoming EU initiatives, including the views of [workers' trade unions](#) and [teachers' trade unions](#) on the Skills Portability Initiative, calling for stronger trade union involvement in the recognition and portability of VET qualifications, and explained a [position paper of the teachers trade unions on quality assurance](#).

Development of the thematic guidance on 'Quality Assurance of Basic Skills in VET'

In the first half of 2026, a dedicated Working Group of the EQAVET Network worked on a 'Thematic guidance on Quality Assurance of Basic Skills in VET'. An advanced draft was shared before the meeting, with the aim of collecting feedback on the practical usability of the document for the NRP's own work in that area. There was overall support for applying existing EQAVET descriptors to quality assurance of basic skills in VET, yet the need for clearer framing and guidance was highlighted. A user-friendly and implementable tool requires more good-practice examples, and the specifics of CVET should be better addressed.

Next steps

The presentations and further documents from the meeting will be available on the [events' resource page](#) and the [EQAVET Community Space TEAMS page](#). A full summary report from the meeting will be circulated by mid-July 2026.