



The role of quality assurance in advancing basic skills in VET

Summary Report from the EQAVET Peer Learning Activity

4-5 November 2025

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1. Setting the scene

Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG EMPL, European Commission opened the EQAVET PLA by emphasising that the focus of this year's EQAVET PLA is timely and important. Findings from PISA and PIAAC data showcase a worrying decline of basic skills across Europe, notably in literacy, numeracy and science amongst VET learners and adults already in the labour market. Almost one in three 15-year-olds struggle with mathematics and one in five adults in the European Union lack basic literacy and numeracy proficiency. This situation impacts not only individuals' ability to live an active life but also brings negative impact to the wider society in terms of productivity, innovation and social cohesion. He mentioned that the Union of Skills launched in March 2025 sets out an ambitious policy agenda for skills preparedness. The associated Action Plan for Basic Skills calls for urgent and coordinated actions to strengthen a wide definition of basic skills including literacy, numeracy, science, as well as democratic citizenship and digital skills. This EQAVET PLA focused on the first three skills as previous PLAs have focused on democratic citizenship and digital skills in VET. Moreover, this PLA is relevant to two upcoming EU initiatives announced in the Basic Skills Action Plan, notably the development of guidelines on enhancing basic skills in VET and a toolkit for basic skills in apprenticeships.

The 2025 European Semester Spring Package reinforces this urgency, with country-specific recommendations issued to 12 Member States specifically calling for action to strengthen basic skills. This reflects a broader EU-wide concern articulated in the Commission's overarching communication, which positions the decline in foundational skills as central to Europe's future prosperity, linking it directly to persistent labour shortages and the need to boost human capital for a competitive and inclusive Europe. The challenge is particularly acute for VET systems, which must balance vocational skill development with basic skills acquisition whilst serving learners who often arrive with foundational competence gaps from lower secondary education.

2. Objectives of the PLA

Around 60 participants attended the EQAVET PLA, representing 24 EU and Non-EU countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

The majority of PLA participants work at a Ministry/national authority related to VET, but there was also a high share of participants from VET providers, and other Ministries/national authorities.

The PLA explored the topic of basic skills in VET and how the EQAVET Framework could be leveraged to develop effective quality assurance measures. The event was structured around the following guiding questions:

- ❖ What is the state of play for basic skills provision in VET, and what are the remaining challenges?
- ❖ What lessons can be learnt from effective national practice?
- ❖ How can quality assurance of basic skills in VET be strengthened?
- ❖ Which support could the EQAVET framework provide in fostering quality assurance of basic skills in VET at national level?

The first day of the EQAVET PLA focused on building a shared understanding of the state of play for basic skills provision in VET and how it is quality assured. On the second day, the programme focused more directly on quality assurance elements and the role of the EQAVET framework. Representatives from Estonia, Austria, France and Germany shared country level examples.

3. Introduction to the PLA topic

Monika Auzinger (3s) and Stepan Kment (ICF) acted as thematic experts and shared a keynote presentation introducing the topic by providing an overview of key concepts, basic skills performance data, the policy landscape including the Action Plan for Basic Skills and key considerations for quality assurance and the EQAVET framework. Basic skills were defined as foundational competences underpinning learning, work, inclusion and citizenship.

The experts highlighted concerning performance patterns from PISA 2022, where EU underachievement rates reached 29% in mathematics, 26% in reading and 24% in science - well above the 15% target for 2030. Particularly significant were the performance gaps between VET and general education students, with the average mathematics gap in participating EU Member States reaching 90.3 points compared to the OECD average of 72 points. Countries such as Slovakia and Hungary showed gaps exceeding 125 points, equivalent to 3-4 years of schooling, whilst Austria demonstrated more integrated approaches with a gap of only 25 points.

PIAAC 2023 data revealed equally challenging trends for adult basic skills, with approximately 18% of adults across OECD countries lacking basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Over the past decade, literacy proficiency declined in seven EU Member States, with skills inequalities widening particularly amongst the least educated populations. The convergence of these trends - students entering VET with weak foundations facing adult working lives requiring increasingly sophisticated competences - underscores the imperative for strengthened quality assurance approaches.

The experts outlined how VET systems across Europe have responded through various curricular approaches. Many Member States have strengthened general education components or better integrated basic skills within vocational curricula, either through standalone modules or contextualised delivery within occupational subjects. However, implementation challenges persist: basic skills components sometimes remain less clearly defined in learning outcomes than occupation-specific competences, and pedagogical approaches vary considerably in how effectively they embed literacy, numeracy and scientific reasoning within practical workplace contexts.

Regarding quality assurance, the presentation mapped how EQAVET's four-phase cycle - planning, implementation, evaluation and review - can support systematic approaches to basic skills development. The experts emphasised that effective quality assurance requires clear, measurable objectives for basic skills achievement, established procedures for curricular integration across school-based and work-based settings, mechanisms for monitoring progression and early intervention, and review processes that translate evaluation data into curricular and pedagogical improvements.

Participants were asked to share their views on the main challenges to quality assure basic skills in VET and the issue of time constraints in curricula stood out, see below.

Wordcloud poll

What are the main challenges to quality assure basic skills in VET?

0 2 4

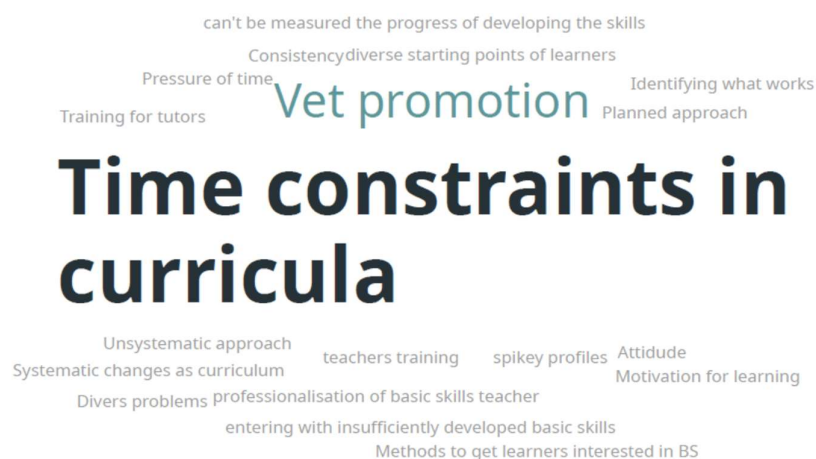


Figure 1: Word cloud of replies to a Sli.do question

4. Country examples of quality assuring basic skills in VET

Across Europe, data show a common trend of lower basic skills levels amongst VET students in comparison to students in General Education; a finding that underlines the need for targeted initiatives. Speakers shared country level examples of how basic skills are integrated and quality assured in VET in Estonia, Austria, France and Germany.

Estonia

Rita Kask-Klesmann (MoER Vocational Education and Skills Policy Department) and Kai Hermann (Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA)) presented policy initiatives and quality assurance to strengthen the basic skills of VET learners. The Estonian VET curricula are linked to the national qualifications framework and are modularised and outcome based.

Estonia is navigating several challenges including a high dropout rate in VET programmes (around 20 %) and there is a particular gender aspect where there is a larger share of boys that are considered as low achievers and are dropping out of secondary programmes. Moreover, different secondary paths are not equally valued (no standard for upper secondary education) and there is a lack of qualified vocational educators and specialists.

Estonia is using research to shape the VET provisions including the design of programmes, learning pathways, decision for funding and changes in the school networks. For example, the Estonian Education Quality Agency provide reports to improve the teaching and learning. Several VET-related reforms have recently been launched to ensure that VET is more aligned with future trends and leads to more choices after graduation. The vocational secondary education has been extended with an additional year and is now including more focus on basic education.

A new model for quality assurance was drafted in 2025 and focuses more on a provider-level approach. Each school develops their own self-analysis report, and the process involves consultations with employers' evaluation visits and finally, a development plan is created. External quality assessment is mandatory, and the criteria are in line with both EU (EQAVET) and Estonian guidelines. The self-analysis criteria do not specifically mention basic skills, but they are included, for example via the criteria of ensuring that teaching methods and assessments supports students in reaching the learning outcomes and to develop key competences. Moreover, depending on the needs of each provider, a stronger focus on basic skills can be applied. Training experts are also supporting schools to continuously improve, by asking 'why' and 'how' questions to the providers. Evaluation committees give improvement suggestions to schools and below follow a few examples of suggestions related to basic skills in VET:

- ❖ Increase collaboration between general education and VET teachers
- ❖ Cooperation with location general education schools to have cross-usage of teachers
- ❖ Develop curricula development that includes elective support on basic skills and revising of the materials and methods used in school.
- ❖ Participation in language buddy initiative and increasement of teachers' professional development.

At the end of the presentation, the PLA participants asked the following questions:

- ❖ **Can you please clarify how the VET curricula (240 credits which covers 4 years of studies) is distinguished from tertiary education?** Answer: In the Estonian qualification framework, it is stipulated that VET is on EQF level 2-5 and upper secondary VET is positioned at EQF level 4. In this sense, VET is not connected to higher education (starts at EQF 6).
- ❖ **You mentioned that General Education (GE) teachers can be brought in to teach in VET programmes and other local cooperations between GE and VET schools, could you elaborate on how this works in the Estonian system?** Answer: The local collaboration has been supported by a reform introduced in 2015 and is mainly linked to cross-usage of teachers. This is common because there is a current teacher shortage. General education subjects are integrated in VET curricula so the teaching can easily be transferred. In some schools, GE and VET teachers teach at the same time, merging different topics – for example, learning relevant vocabulary in English for the car mechanic sector.

Austria

Jouko Luomi (Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education and Training) stated the NRP is a unit of the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation with EQAVET being on of their main activities.

VET students can choose different learning paths in Austria, the system offers apprenticeship programmes, dual VET programmes and full-time school programmes. The apprenticeship programmes have their own specialised curricula, but the other two programmes have similar functions. Basic skills are integrated in all VET curricula. More specifically, Austria has eight key integrated competences, which are:

- ❖ Literacy competence
- ❖ Multilingual competence (at least one foreign language)
- ❖ Mathematics and STEM competences
- ❖ Digital competence

- ❖ Personal, social, and learning to learn competence
- ❖ Citizenship competence
- ❖ Entrepreneurship competence
- ❖ Cultural awareness and expression competence.

However, it is important to note that the VET pathways differ in how much attention (curricula, teaching time) is given to each competence. The quality assurance of these key competences is based on the Austrian Quality Management System (QMS). There is an emphasis on giving more autonomy to VET schools to decide how to operate and decide their targets based on local needs. The VET schools have access to standardised tools (via the QMS) to plan their actions.

The Level-Up adult education project started in 2012 and provides basic skills education to low-skilled persons aged 15 and older with the aim of achieving a comprehensive and regionally balanced education offer across Austria. The project is currently in its fourth implementation phase, and the budget is around 30 million EUR on an annual basis.

The project offers programmes with focus on basic skills short courses (around 7000 participants annually) and compulsory school-leaving qualifications programme (around 2000 participants annually). Courses are offered as add-ons in smaller groups across the country and are intended to enable participants to have an active public life and provide them with further perspectives including more training and access to the labour market.

Education institutions can apply to become accredited to offer courses within the Level-Up project. The accreditation process addresses the quality of the institutional condition (mission statement, organisation chart etc.), quality of the concept for the learning course) and qualification of the involved staff.

Once accredited, the education institution is eligible to apply for funding and start offering courses (that need to be free of charge for the participants). The institutions need to document the implementation and share monitoring information in a database.

The project has produced a qualification profile for trainers in courses of basic skills linked to quality criteria. Participants can also be offered additional counselling and coaching via the programmes.

Participants were invited to ask questions at the end of the presentation, below follows a summary:

- ❖ **How is low motivation to learn basic skills amongst students addressed in VET programmes where there is a less emphasis on these skills?** Answer: One of the strengths of the Austrian system is that it offers different solutions depending on the type of motivation amongst students. For example, the apprenticeship programme offers a great learning pathway for students that wants to focus on practical skills. These programmes try to offer basic skills education via the practical courses, to better contextualise the relevance of the learning. For example, adapted mathematics linked to the profession rather than only theoretical learning.
- ❖ **How is the Level-Up project impact distributed across regions and at national level?** Answer: There is no complete overview to be provided at this time, but it can be mentioned that the project is regarded as very successful. Across the last couple of years, around 30000 participants started basic skills courses and 22000 completed them. The course diploma can be used in applying for further learning or to enter the labour market.

- ❖ **Regarding the QMS model in schools, can you assess in which area of schools the QMS model can have the greatest impact?** Answer: The greatest impact can be associated with how the schools overall are now working. The QMS gives concrete support for schools to take their own responsibility to plan how to develop their school and involve stakeholders.

France

Matteo Sgarzi (Cereq) explained that his organisation is the French public centre of research and studies on qualifications with a focus on the linkages between training and the labour market.

In France, there is a variety of ways to obtain qualifications in France including those issued by the State and private actors, via different routes including IVET, CVET, VPL and apprenticeships. In the French qualifications issued by the State, there is a common core of knowledge, culture and competences which an approach launched in 2005. This is an integrated part of the curricula for all levels in the education system. For VET, it means that the curricula encompass these qualifications and the vocational qualifications. The core curriculum focusses on supporting citizenship and employability and includes five transversal domains: languages for thinking and communicating, methods and tools for learning, personal and citizenship education, natural and technical systems, and representation of the world and human activity.

A general placement test that is administrated in upper secondary education (including VET schools) provides a standardised approach to understand skills levels of students. The test includes a focus on basic skills (French language, mathematics) and showcase results that are particularly alarming for the VET sector. In 2024, 25.3% of students in general and technological secondary education had low performance in basic skills, while this share reached 71.2% among students in vocational education.

France has a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening basic skills education including working in smaller groups for certain topics like French and mathematics, teachers are asked to include basic skills as cross-cutting themes and professional development priority for students. Tutors from work-based education have also been engaged to focus more on basic skills. Teachers and tutors are encouraged to work in teams to address basic skills, and they are supported via an academic council for fundamental knowledge.

Overall, France is working to improve the attractiveness of VET to be able to attract a more diverse population of students. This is done via a focus on excellence:

- ❖ Curricula update every 5 years to address new competences and skills
- ❖ Build skills ecosystems with links to companies and research
- ❖ Work-based learning and apprenticeships to enhance employability of students
- ❖ Focus on digital and green skills to address current gaps in the labour market.

Outside of the school system, there are different basic skills initiatives targeted at workers and jobseekers, led by a range of actors under the oversight of the Ministry of Labour. There are private initiatives linked to basic skills with specific reference to the EC recommendations on key competences and targeted at groups with low level of basic skills:

- ❖ The APP (Ateliers pédagogiques personnalisés) is a label for training bodies that uses specific learning methods for courses on general education and basic technology, so

called personalised educational workshops. They cater to a diverse audience with strong links to the community.

- ❖ The Cléa (Certificat de connaissances et de compétences professionnelles) is a private qualification focused on the transition into the workforce and should be assessed within a vocational context. It includes a range of basic skills as well as other aspects.

These initiatives have been designed by social partners with the aim of certifying the ability to take up a job.

Following the end of the presentation, the PLA participants asked the following questions:

- ❖ **Is there a difference in learning outcomes for democratic citizenship education in General Education (GE) and VET? Are there any differences in how this subject is taught in GE and VET?** Answer: the learning objectives are the same for GE and VET students; however, the pedagogy can differ due to the differences in the programmes.
- ❖ **Who is responsible for the placement tests and how is it organised? What is the age of the students taking this test?** Answer: The Ministry of Education is responsible for the test, and students are 16 years old when taking it. Schools are administering the test.

Germany

Anne Pförtner (German Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) presented an overview of the German National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education (called AlphaDekade in German) and its initiatives.

An online survey from 2011 showcased that 7.5 million people in Germany cannot read and write properly. In 2018, this figure was 6.1 million. According to the latest PIAAC data, approximately 20 % of the German adult population only reach level 1 out of 5 in reading competences. A German survey shows that low literacy is more prominent in certain sectors, for example, 47 % of the people working in food preparation and 30 % of the cleaning personnel.

Illiteracy serves as obstacles to actively engage in society and to enter the labour market. Germany identified a range of actions that could be taken to improve competences, such as increasing awareness of the issue (often stigmatised and people do not dare to open up about it), expand research and learning opportunities and emphasise on professionalisation of those working on expanding basic skills.

The National Decade is implemented by both the federal (research, cooperation amongst Ministries etc.) and the state level (legally responsible for education, institutional funding, teacher trainer etc.). In terms of research and development, Germany funds research on learning processes etc. But also focus on life-oriented training (non-formal, self-organising), work-oriented education and pathways of basic education. According to conducted surveys, two-thirds of the target groups have jobs, so a lot of initiatives are targeted work-based training, mentoring and the offer of online courses that are work-oriented. For example, one project called ABC Connect which provides an AI-based platform for creating your own digital learning units.

At the start of the Decade launch, the federal and state funding structures were partially disconnected, and this meant some new concepts are not well anchored in the structures. To mitigate this, Germany has increased collaboration between education providers (VET and

General Education) at regional level and launched new transitions and pathways for basic education.

Germany has put particular emphasis on strengthening the professionalisation of teachers working on basic skills education, a framework curriculum has been developed along with comprehensive learning materials. Many projects have integrated scientific experts and evaluation activities, and a meta-research project has been integrated to the pathways of basic education. At federal level, there has been an evaluation of the goal attainment and effectiveness of the overall Decade. This evaluation generated advice to have more coherent structures and to introduce research groups to identify interdependencies between learning needs, structures and professionalisation of education providers. The federal team has also implemented an evaluation on the pathways of basic education which resulted in feedback to introduce more different funding options and further pursue monitoring of activities.

The Decade will end in 2026, and Germany is currently exploring different ways to ensure sustainability and priorities what should be continued. To conclude, below follows some of their main findings to consider for the future:

- ❖ In-company, work-based oriented basic education can motivate more people to continue to learn
- ❖ Labour market instruments can be adapted to a target group by establishing networks between employment services, adult education providers and companies.
- ❖ A meta project can foster scientific approaches and generate evidence to support improvement of projects and generate more learning outcomes.

After the presentation, the PLA participants asked the following questions:

- ❖ **Most of the courses are blended courses or online, does this assume that the learners have the digital skills to take this one? Secondly, good to see that there are guided schemes and counselling for people as this helps to get a better understanding and overview, do you have any data on their impact?** Answer: Many States have basic skills centres which functions as the first contact point and work a lot on raising awareness locally. In-company mentors have been successful but there are no comprehensive data on the outcomes.
- ❖ **Is there a system of validation and recognition of the in-company learning?** Answer: If it is funded by the employment agencies, the education provider needs to be certified and there you have the system for validation and certification. The general basic skills courses are not validated.
- ❖ **Looking into the future, what is needed to stabilise the system for all these initiatives?** Answers: the States needs to take ownership and implement on a regular basis, there also needs to be a system for networks, carers and guides to support the efforts.

5. Group discussions

Day 1

On the first day of the PLA, participants were divided into two groups to discuss the following two questions:

- **What is the state of play for basic skills provision in VET, and what are the remaining challenges?**
- **What lessons can be learnt from effective national practice?**

The issue of lack of basic skills often originates from primary education, meaning that students start their VET programmes without sufficient competences. In addition, there are often big variations in basic skills levels amongst students in the same programme. The providers are often ill-equipped to respond to support these students, due to a range of issues, participants mentioned a lack of teaching time, curricula overload and low motivation to learn basic skills. In connection with work-based learning settings, collaboration between schools and workplaces in teaching and assessing basic skills is often considered a challenge, in particular when appropriate structures and mechanisms for collaboration between the different learning environments are lacking. A participant reflected that national QA system and policy development can feel far away from the reality of in the VET programmes. Below follow a few country examples:

- ❖ In Greece, basic skills are included in the IVET training guides however, there is an issue of pedagogy as teachers find it difficult to teach it. There is a dual challenge to know how to balance and align improvement efforts at system level and provider level.
- ❖ In Ireland, the national QA system and overall education system do not have sufficient focus on basic skills, and many students can enter degrees unprepared, with a lack of foundational skills. There is a need for more tools and individual focus on students. In Irish prison education, the level of literacy can vary a lot and there is a time pressure to deliver the education which consequently makes it difficult to quality assure the education. Teachers struggle to find time to provide a student-by-student focus.
- ❖ In Luxembourg, the issue of basic skills is not related to the VET programme but rather that students arrive without the necessary competencies in maths and literacy. They piloted a modular system without grades (only pass or failed) which made many teachers uncomfortable, so grades have been introduced again. The system now assumes that VET students have the required competences and struggle to help those that do not.
- ❖ In Croatia, there is a lack of motivation to learn basic skills amongst students and there is an identified need for more collaboration between VET and GE teachers. Schools can organise additional courses on basic skills, but this is up to the provider to decide, it will be important to consider how quality assurance and national support can strengthen basic skills education in VET programmes.

The definitions of learning outcomes related to basic skills and the roles and responsibilities of students and teachers are important to steer support that ensure students have the right to learn. Participants discussed how to introduce and maintain standards linked to basic skills, for example, with or without a linked grading level.

An example shared from Slovenia illustrated how the country, as part of its VET reform, seeks to promote a competence-based teaching and learning approach, integrating theory with

practice, and combining vocational modules with general subjects, and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration between educators. Schools provide tutoring, remedial classes, and tailored entry programmes for students with gaps in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. Additionally, the reform emphasises training for educators on teaching key competences and embedding them into problem-based teaching.

A range of actionable ideas and lessons learnt were shared, including:

- ❖ More tools and flexible scheduling enabling individual and student-focused teaching
- ❖ Enhanced national guidance and awareness on basic skills in VET
- ❖ Introduce 'early warning systems' to identify a lack of basic skills earlier in education and national systems to address the issue of students dropping out of education early.
- ❖ VET programmes could be delivered in more languages and at the same time, offer courses in the national languages to encourage active citizenship
- ❖ Modular teaching and increased collaboration between VET teachers and GE teachers including classroom observations and combined teaching.

Participants discussed how the role of quality assurance should be defined, is it embedded in the system or detached and what implications it may have for basic skills in VET. Quality assurance is a supporting tool in advancing basic skills in VET.

Day 2

On Day 2, participants were again divided into two groups, this time to discuss the following two questions:

- **How can quality assurance of basic skills in VET be strengthened?**
- **Which support could the EQAVET framework provide in fostering quality assurance of basic skills in VET?**

One of the key aspects highlighted by participants is for basic skills requirements be appropriately integrated in VET qualifications and curricula, in the sense that they are **clearly defined and stated** in reference documents and described in terms of measurable learning outcomes. It was argued that for IVET qualifications, the 'core of basic skills' should be based on the same level of requirements as for general education.

The effective development of basic skills in a VET context requires **effective teaching and assessment methods**. Interdisciplinary teaching, problem solving or scenario-based learning were cited by discussants as some possible examples. Applying these methods, however, can be a challenge for educators, and more emphasis should be placed in providing them with the competences and flexibility needed to effectively implement them.

Participants shared the following suggestions that could be further explored:

- ❖ Professionalisation modules for educators: equip educators with the skills and competences required to teach basic skills (in particular with regard to innovative teaching methods and interdisciplinary approaches).
- ❖ Objective and valid assessment methods and tools: provide suitable assessment methods and tools to VET schools and educators alongside guidance and training on how to implement them. These could be inspired by good practice from international assessments (e.g. PISA, PIAAC). These could also include a formative element, e.g. through self-assessment questionnaires for learners to reflect on their basic skills level.

- ❖ Tools to support VET institutions in monitoring basic skills provision: e.g. similar to the existing SELFIE tool for learning in the digital age.
- ❖ Develop basic skills requirements at EU level (e.g. for different EQF levels).
- ❖ Facilitate interaction and cooperation between teachers of vocational and general education subjects, and with trainers in work-based settings.
- ❖ Monitor basic skills levels as part of graduate tracking activities.

Participants were also invited to reflect on the **role that the EQAVET framework can play** in ensuring quality assurance of basic skills in VET. The discussion also aimed to explore whether specific quality assurance indicators or descriptors tailored to basic skills could help strengthen quality assurance of basic skills. In this regard, discussants generally considered the EQAVET framework as both comprehensive and specific enough to provide guidance. Nevertheless, they welcomed the idea of having a further discussion on the EQAVET descriptors in light of basic skills, to determine if the framework could provide tailored guidance to strengthen the quality assurance of basic skills. Furthermore, participants suggested promoting the exchange of good practices across countries through peer learning activities or thematic country reviews, for example. Participants reiterated that these activities should align closely with those planned as part of the Action Plan for Basic Skills.

6. Concluding remarks

Stepan Kment (ICF) and Monika Auzinger (3s) provided concluding observations drawing on the presentations, country examples and workshop discussions.


Monika pointed to the curricular constraints and lack of flexibility for effective basic skills delivery that were shared by many PLA participants. Many VET systems are set up in a way that does not easily allow educators to collaborate in a cross-disciplinary manner across learning environments (including workplace settings) and subjects.

Educators (teachers, in-company trainers) are often reported to lack the specific skills and competence to implement innovative teaching methods considered effective to develop basic skills in VET contexts. This underlines the need for targeted support and capacity building for educators for the delivery and assessment of basic skills. At the same time, strategies should also consider how increasing demands and pressures placed on educators can be mitigated.

This PLA highlighted the appetite and need among VET stakeholders for further exchange on effective approaches to deliver and quality assure basic skills.

Stepan emphasised three priority areas for advancing quality assurance of basic skills in VET systems. First, modularisation offers considerable potential for addressing the diverse basic skills needs of VET learners. Modular approaches enable more flexible pathways, allowing students to progress at appropriate rates whilst ensuring foundational competences are secured before advancing to more complex vocational content. However, successful modularisation requires clear articulation of learning outcomes for basic skills components and systematic quality assurance of how these modules integrate with occupation-specific learning.

Second, basic skills development must be woven more explicitly into quality assurance processes at both system and provider levels. This means moving beyond treating basic skills as implicit assumptions within broader quality frameworks towards establishing specific indicators, descriptors and review mechanisms focused on literacy, numeracy and scientific competences. The EQAVET framework provides appropriate tools for this integration,



particularly through its emphasis on stakeholder engagement, evidence-based evaluation and continuous improvement cycles.

Third, addressing basic skills challenges requires recognising both system-level policy responsibilities and provider-level pedagogical realities. National authorities must provide clear frameworks, adequate resources and professional development support, whilst VET providers need sufficient autonomy to adapt approaches to their learners' specific needs. Quality assurance mechanisms should facilitate this balance rather than imposing uniform solutions that may not fit diverse institutional contexts.

The discussions throughout the PLA demonstrated that whilst basic skills challenges are widespread, effective responses exist across European VET systems. The task ahead involves systematic knowledge exchange, adaptation of promising practices to different national contexts, and sustained commitment to ensuring VET delivers both occupational competences and the foundational skills essential for lifelong learning and active citizenship.