

# UEAPME opinion on the implementation of the European tools EQF, ECVET, EQAVET

## 1 - EQF - State of play of implementation

**Current situation:** Today ten countries have completed their National Qualifications Frameworks and have referenced them to the EQF (European Qualifications Framework): Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Ireland, Estonia, France, Latvia, Netherlands, Malta, Portugal, UK. Four more countries are expected to reference their NQF to the EQF by the end of 2011: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Finland.

**Challenges:** Despite the same “rules of the game”, NQFs differ tremendously. There are differences in scope, i.e. in some countries the NQF covers all subsystems, in others only specific qualification types. More worryingly there are also clear signs of inconsistencies concerning the placing of similar qualifications at different levels.

- example 1: School leaving certificates are placed at level 4 in all countries. The Netherlands places this type of school leaving certificate at level 5.
- example 2: VET qualifications at skilled worker level in most countries are placed at level 4. In the Czech Republic they are placed at level 3 and in Portugal at level 5. Both countries referred to political and social reasons for placing these qualifications at their respective level (in the case of Portugal: to make VET more attractive; in the case of the Czech Republic: the general public does not perceive VET at the same level as General Education). At the current stage the Master Degree is likely to be placed at level 6 in Germany and Austria and whereas it is at level 5 in France.

**Position of UEAPME:** UEAPME supports the general idea and objectives of the EQF and in particular the principle of parity of esteem between General Education and VET that lies at the heart of the EQF recommendation and specifically the EQF descriptors. As the EQF and the underlying NQFs should be more than an education policy instrument, it is of highest importance that stakeholders from the world of work are consulted and included in the development of the frameworks in the different Member States.

At European level UEAPME sees the necessity of a good and balanced coordination role by the European Commission. UEAPME proposes that the new education programme is used to finance projects which have to do plausibility checks on the placement of similar qualifications in different countries (such as the Zoom Project did for the Meister/brevet de maîtrise qualification). It will be important to understand NQFs as a constant work in progress with the possibility of having second and third rounds of referencing. Special attention needs to put on the planned EQF portal, which intends to link the different national qualification databases. This portal needs to be user friendly for SMEs.

Furthermore UEAPME sees the need for a better coordination and complementarities between the various tools that are carried on by the European Commission. For example, there is a need to create a better link between the EQF and ESCO.

## 2 - ECVET - State of play of implementation

**Current situation and challenges:** The commitment of the EU Member States concerning the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is very moderate. One reason might be that the implementation of the EQF via National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) still has priority.

For this reason the EC has initiated a bunch of different initiatives, such as:

- ECVET Users' Group
- ECVET Network
- ECVET network of the National Agencies
- Call for national ECVET experts financed by the EC
- ECVET pilot projects (2009 – 2012)
- Second generation of pilot-projects (2010 – 2013)

However, there is a lack of transparency in this constellation of structures and activities.

**Position of UEAPME:** Not all elements of ECVET are applicable in the national contexts, especially the use of ECVET points and the assessment, transfer and recognition of units of learning outcomes. Concerning the examination there are strict limitations due to national legislation. A partial revision of the ECVET recommendation on the basis of the results of the pilot projects (end of March 2012) seems to be necessary to overcome the current limitations.

UEAPME still considers that ECVET should be a voluntary instrument to facilitate transnational mobility and permeability in VET.

Important for a successful implementation of ECVET is an appropriate infrastructure, as it is not very likely that SMEs will use ECVET without guidance and support. In this context the intermediary organisations, such as chambers of skilled crafts, can play an important role.

## 3 - EQAVET - State of play of implementation

**Current situation:** The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Recommendation contains a set of indicative descriptors and indicators at system and provider level for quality assurance in VET. Member States were asked to develop national approaches for the implementation of EQAVET by 18 June 2011, as well as to set-up national Quality Assurance Reference Points. An EU survey is currently being evaluated on the state of implementation in Member States. The Bruges Communiqué calls on Member States to establish Quality Assurance frameworks at national level for VET providers that also apply to workplace learning compatible with EQAVET by 2015.

**Challenges:** VET systems and VET provision vary considerably across the EU. Just as VET consists of different forms from Initial VET, Continuous VT, to informal learning and company-based provision, so can training providers be any organisation or individual offering training, such as companies or higher education

establishments. In addition, Member States are at varying starting points regarding quality assurance in VET with some being relatively new to this topic and others with well-developed systems.

**Position of UEAPME:** UEAPME supports EQAVET as a toolbox to improve quality assurance, transparency and mutual trust in VET according to the situation in Member States.

Support, cooperation and coordination are important issues in EQAVET at present:

- supporting the implementation through facilitating cooperation between Member States, social partners and other relevant stakeholders at EU, national, regional and sectoral level in the whole process and notably through the National Reference Points
- coordination with the other instruments developed at European level, namely ECVET and EQF
- supporting peer learning and good practice dissemination through QALLL and EQAVET projects and others related to lifelong learning

From an employers' and SME perspective quality assurance management has to be adapted to the needs and reality of VET providers and their specificities. Quality assurance should be implemented in a userfriendly, simple and cost-effective way. Small VET providers and small enterprises have to feel that working with quality assurance is relevant for them.

Case studies are being identified on individual training providers introducing good practice in quality assurance linked to indicative descriptors and indicators in the EQAVET recommendation. UEAPME sees employability as a key topic in this area.

On the indicators UEAPME considers No. 5 and 6 on employability and output, i.e. placement in VET programmes and utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace particularly useful. There is also a link to the European Commission's work in developing a benchmark on education and training for employability, which should be more closely examined. The input based indicators No. 1 and 2 are less adequate as they focus on the relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers and investment in training of teachers and trainers, whilst not demonstrating actual results.

A set of sectoral seminars are being held involving social partners which are useful to further investigate the needs of different sectors and to be able to feed the results into the ongoing work.

Standardisation has been an issue lately. UEAPME considers this should not be brought into VET. It is too diverse, dependent on sectors and too much linked to national culture and practices to fit into a standardised system.

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