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Quality in the Era of the twin transition and
the role of the Centers of Vocational Excellence

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The EQAVET quality assurance framework

- The **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)** emerged from the **2009 Recommendation of the EU Parliament and Council***, as a European wide framework to support quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) across Europe.
- **EQAVET** does not prescribe a particular quality assurance system or approach but provides **a framework of common principles, indicative descriptors and indicators** that may help in assessing and improving the quality of VET systems and provision.
- **Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training - 2009/C 155/01.*



BACKGROUND



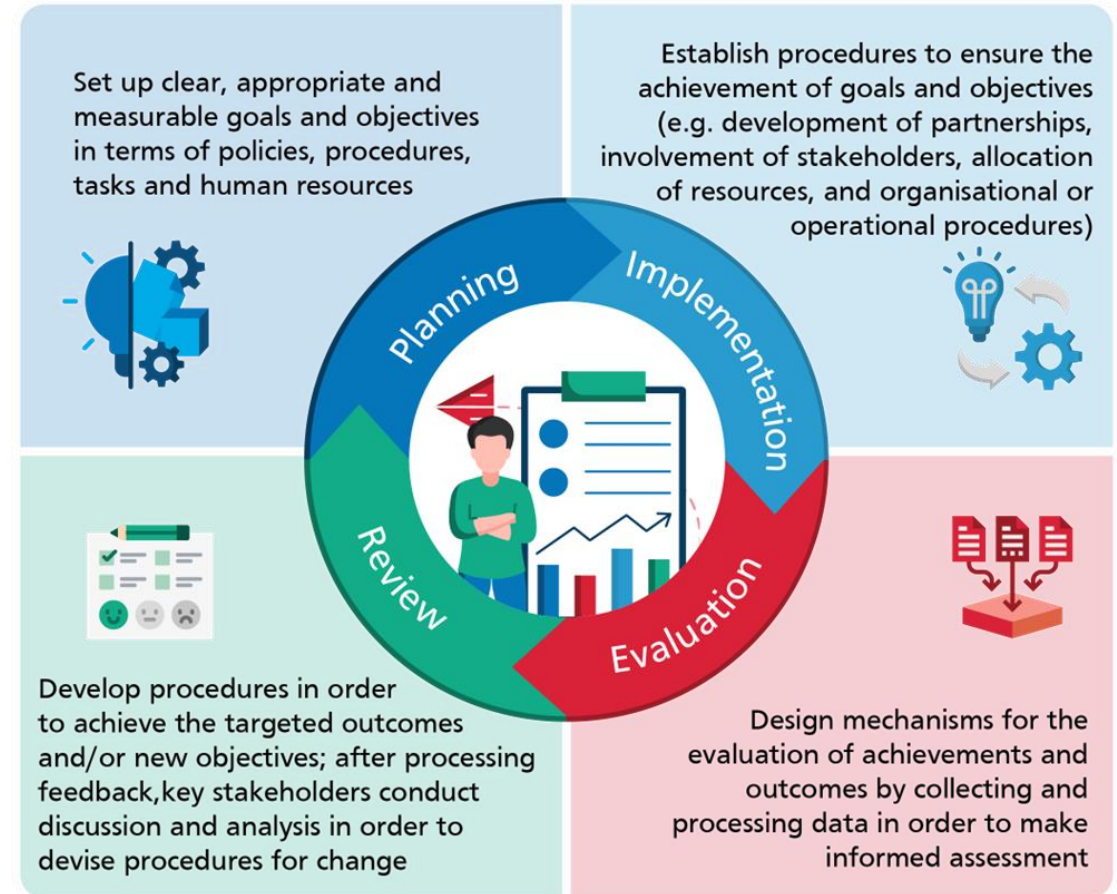
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The Quality Assurance Cycle

The EQAVET Quality Assurance Cycle

EQAVET is based on a quality assurance and improvement cycle (**planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision**) and a **selection of quality descriptors and indicators** applicable to quality management at both VET system and provider levels.



BACKGROUND



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The EQAVET structure

In 2020, with the **Recommendation*** on **vocational education and training** for **sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience**, the EQAVET framework was extended from IVET to CVET.

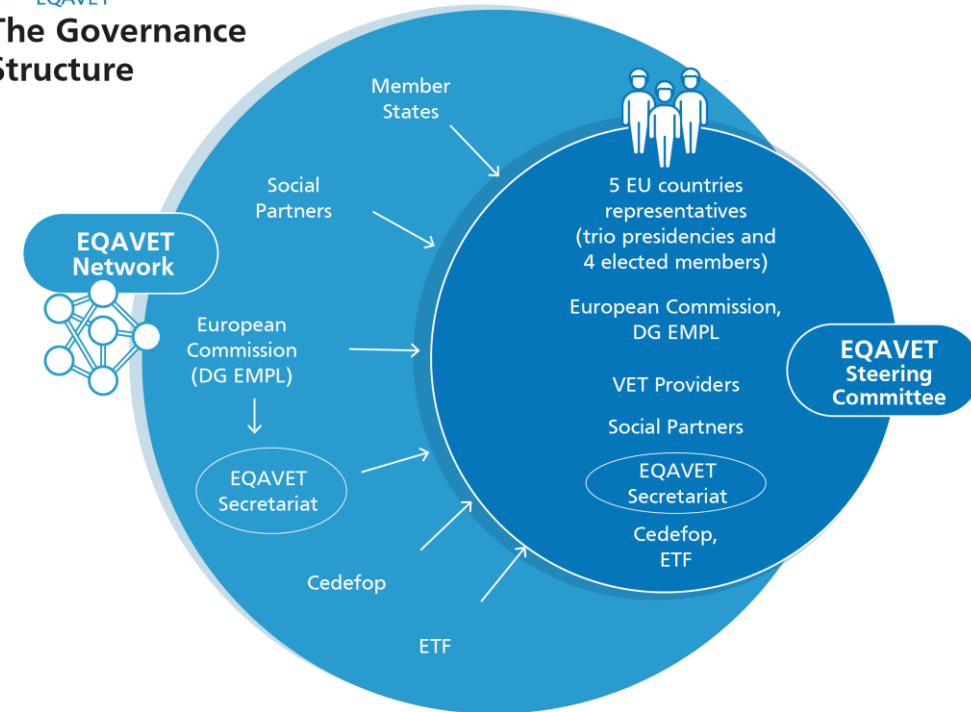
The EQAVET Framework can be used by providers and in systems to support the quality assurance of:

- **all learning environments** (e.g., school-based provision, work-based learning, apprenticeships, formal, informal and nonformal provision);
- **all types of learning contexts** (e.g., digital, face-to-face and blended);
- **all public and private sectors;**
- **awards and qualifications at all levels of EQF.**

* Council of the European Union, (2020a), Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Brussels, Official Journal of the European Union.



The Governance Structure





European VET Recommendation 2020 – the relevance of the Centres of Vocational Excellence

A Quality Assurance National Reference Point for vocational education and training brings together all relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels to:

- take concrete initiatives to implement and further develop the EQAVET Framework;
- **inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework;**
- support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions;
- participate actively in the European network for quality assurance in vocational education and training;
- provide an updated description of the national quality assurance arrangements based on the EQAVET Framework;
- engage in EU level Peer Reviews of quality assurance to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between the Member States.

European Council Recommendation, 2020



BACKGROUND



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The **Italian EQAVET National Reference Point** (NRP) was established in 2006 and is placed in **INAPP**, in Rome.

The Italian **National Reference Point** promotes a **National Board** which includes delegates from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education and Merit, the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces, the Social Partners as well as training experts and representatives belonging to the Italian Vocational Education and Training providers.

The Italian **National Reference Point** encourages the application of the **EU Recommendations** and supports the national process for the implementation and **development of a National QA strategy in VET**, through the dissemination of a technical-scientific Quality Assurance culture and the circulation of practices and tools for the adoption of a continuous improvement process.



CONTEXT

What are the European institutions doing to support the **Centres of Vocational Excellence**?

The European Union aims at introducing a European dimension of vocational excellence by:

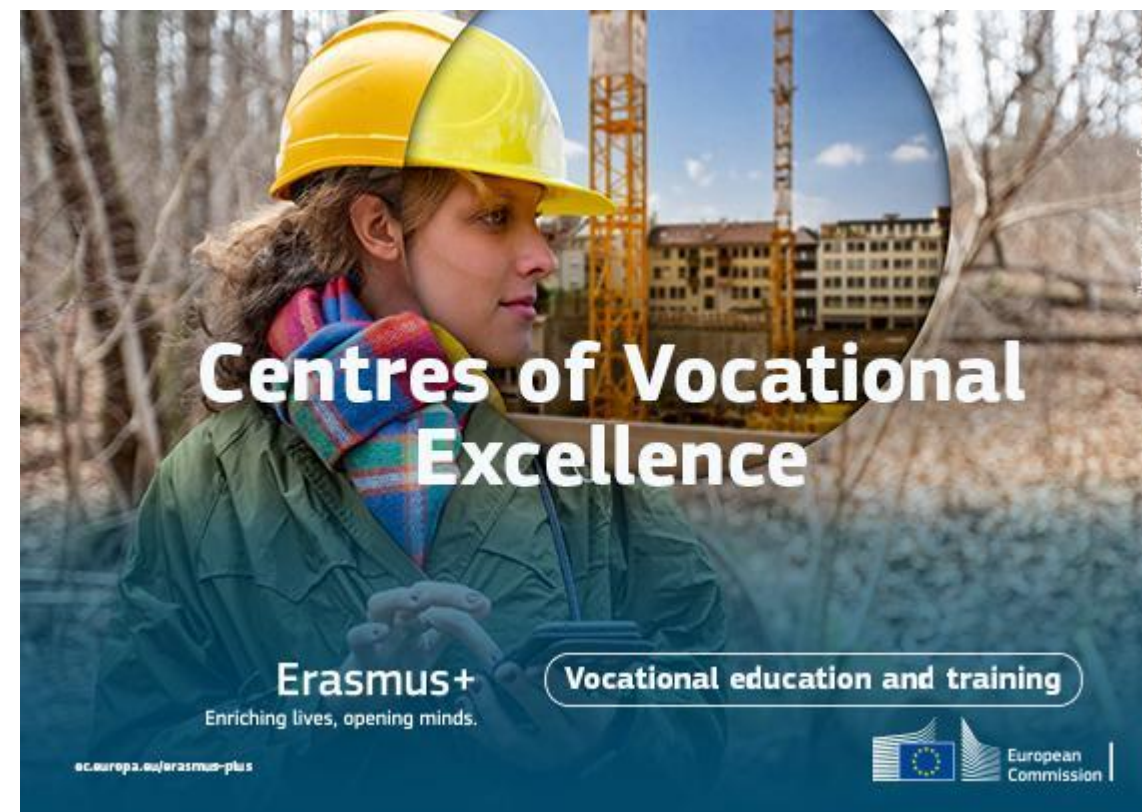
- encouraging **Member States to establish CoVEs** that contribute to create skills ecosystems responding to local needs;
- supporting **international collaborative networks** bringing together CoVEs that share a common interest in developing skills ecosystems.

The European Union supports the CoVEs through:

- the Erasmus+ Programme funding for Centres of Vocational Excellence;
- the International Self-Assessment Tool for Centres of Vocational Excellence.



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European Commission, 2018; 2019



CONTEXT

The **concept of Vocational Excellence** promoted by the European Union is characterised by a **holistic learner-centred approach** in which VET:

- is an **integrated part of skills ecosystems**, contributing to regional development, innovation, smart specialisation and clusters strategies, as well as to specific industrial ecosystems;
- is **part of knowledge triangles**, working closely with other education and training sectors, the scientific community, and business;
- enables learners to acquire both **job-specific as well as key competences** through high-quality provision that is underpinned by quality assurance;
- builds **innovative forms of partnerships** with the world of work and is supported by the professional development of training staff, innovative pedagogies, learners and staff mobility and VET internationalisation strategies.



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EQAVET



EQAVET
National
Reference
Point *Italy*



European
Commission



CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE (CoVEs)

A key initiative of European Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy

April 2021 #EUVocationalExcellence

The initiative on Centres of Vocational Excellence will contribute to empower young people and adults with skills for fulfilling careers, that meet the needs of an innovative, competitive, fair, and sustainable economy.

European Commission, 2018; 2019



METHODOLOGY

In 2023, the Italian NRP launched a national pilot research **establishing a group of experts**, aimed at mapping QA mechanisms and tools with the following objectives:

- to facilitate the relationship, comparison and integration between the education and vocational training system, among different bodies - indeed - but which deal with similar targets in terms of age and training needs with a view to mutual growth;
- to verify the QA mechanisms and tools in the models of CoVEs;
- to raise the quality of the supply of education and vocational training;
- to disseminate new operational tools aimed at encouraging continuous improvement of the quality of the training supply: in particular, self-assessment and external evaluation by Peers.



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The activities planned for achieving the goals set for the national pilot research were the following:

- **Identification of experts and actors** in line with the already approved CoVEs projects/partnerships/consortiums;

- **Establishment of a common language and understanding** related to QA in relation to single CoVEs and CoVEs as a network);

- **Exchange and integration** between education and training structures operating in completely different sectoral, territorial, managerial and so on contexts.



METHODOLOGY



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By focusing the participants' attention on the presentation and description of the approaches and tools used by their CoVEs for quality assurance, both internally and externally, many reflections were gathered which deserve further investigation and analysis.



Focus groups with national experts and representatives and **in-depth interviews** with selected high-level experts on QA of CoVEs took place.



At the end, a total of 16 high level experts from 13 different institutions, including the world of higher education, were involved.



The focus groups and interviews were run from **May 2023** to **April 2024** according to a specific calendar.



As required by the methodology, the National Reference Point elaborated **a semi-structured questionnaire**, conducted the focus groups through 2 online sessions and the online in-depth interviews.



RESULTS



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The focus groups and interviews allowed for a **quick overview** and an initial snapshot of the information available at the level of the Centres of Vocational Excellence and their focus on Quality Assurance measures and systems.



- identification of experiences, examples and practices on the basis of a specific outline used for conducting the pilot research;
- use of the knowledge and expertise of the group of experts and representatives during the research;
- deepening and comparison of theory with practice by INAPP researchers interested in the topic "quality assurance in CoVEs".



The qualitative research approach included the following results:



Need to identify and develop dedicate Quality Assurance measures and/or tools specific for a CoVE.



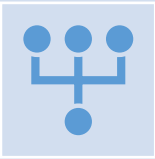
RESULTS



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Experts stressed that, initially, it was quite challenging to integrate QA procedures into the work processes without emphasising aspects perceived as overly burdensome bureaucracy.



In other words, over time, organisations have managed to adapt their quality procedures to meet their organisational needs and have tried to **harmonise their internal quality system with the requirements of providers**, both public administrations and private companies, through accreditation and the acquisition of ISO certifications.



Alongside articulated, well-structured but also complex devices, such as standards for quality certification, focus group participants emphasised the **use of simpler, less elaborate tools, for instance the indicators and standards used in European projects and programmes** – such as the Erasmus+ programme itself, for example – which require the identification of specific indicators for a given "target group", with the aim of measuring at the end of a training course the impact it has had on people at work, training or personal level.



CONCLUSIONS



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The mapping exercise enabled the formulation of a deeper understanding of quality and quality assurance in relation to vocational excellence, that takes into account:

- (a) how QA is currently understood across Europe, where there are different approaches to QA tools and where Quality Assurance sits in different contexts;
- (b) the ambitions expressed by CoVEs and other strategic actors, to improve the quality and excellence of Education and Training provision.

On this basis, vocational excellence involves going beyond what Education and Training would normally be expected to do.



CONCLUSIONS



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Excellence and Quality means going beyond provision that is well tuned to the needs of the labour market, and which meets the needs of citizens for professional career pathways through lifelong learning



It means having in place strategic and systematic Quality assurance plans and processes for engaging with local and regional agendas for sustainability, social and economic development.



It means moving from a position of passive responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders, to being a proactive player in Quality management and control and the formulation and implementation of continuous development and innovation strategies.



Distinctions between sectors (VET, Higher Education and Adult Education) disappear, whilst pathways to higher levels of education and training are widely available and easy to access.



For the future, the idea is to test and pilot also other European tools for QA at sectoral level, such as: the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the EQAVET Framework and the Peer Review methodology as well as other self-assessment tools.





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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

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