

# EQAVET PLA on ‘Quality Assurance in Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)’ – Background note

Virtual meeting, 7 -8 October 2021

## 1. Context

The Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (VET Recommendation)<sup>1</sup> promotes **Centres of Vocational Excellence** as world-class reference points for training in specific areas for both initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling. It also calls for the **EQAVET National Reference Points** (NRPs) (among other activities) ‘to inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework.’ EQAVET, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, has been evolving since 2009 to underpin quality improvement in VET.

This PLA offers the opportunity to bring together the concepts of CoVEs and quality assurance, to share and discuss experiences of representatives of the two networks and to reflect on mutually beneficial aspects and possible future developments. More concretely, the event will be used to collectively work towards the development of specific guidelines for CoVE projects to adopt the EQAVET descriptors and indicators.

## 2. Introduction of the topic

### 2.1 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)

**Vocational excellence** is not a new term – as a broad concept it has been used for many years in relation to education and training to emphasise talent, engagement, and a striving for continuously improving education systems. It is also well known from the context of skills competitions, such as WorldSkills Competitions which assess the level of proficiency or excellence in a competitive environment and are intended to reflect international best practice.<sup>2</sup> Whilst quality has been prominent in the Copenhagen process from the start in 2002, the concept of ‘excellence’ has emerged more slowly but has been taken up in key policies at European and national levels during the last years. In Finland, for example, the VET Quality Strategy 2020-2030 refers to continuous improvement towards excellence as one of the strategic policies up to 2030: ‘Those working in VET will develop their work systematically and pro-actively to respond to changing requirements of the operating environment. They and the entire competence development system is able to recognise when changes are needed and to update and develop quality management systems in line with them. The improvement of quality is based on continuous learning and strive for excellence in all activities.’<sup>3</sup>

Excellence in VET has a close relationship to the new and emerging challenges Europe faces in its economies and societies, driven by environmental crises and technological developments (the green and digital transitions). These forces are setting new requirements for VET to step up its game, to look beyond itself to wider engagement, broader partnerships, and internationalisation.

The Commission first announced the **CoVE initiative** in the Communication on Building a Stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies (European Commission 2018<sup>4</sup>). However, an

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)

<sup>2</sup> <https://worldskills.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-system/finnish-vocational-education-and-training/quality-assurance-national-reference/vet-quality-strategy-and-frameworks>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0268&from=EN>



initiative to promote Vocational Excellence has been called for since 2004.<sup>5</sup> The 2020 VET Recommendation refers to this concept and promotes Centres of Vocational Excellence as world-class reference points for training in specific areas for both initial training and continuing up-skilling and re-skilling: Centres of Vocational Excellence act as catalysts for local business investment, supporting recovery, green and digital transitions, European and regional innovation and smart specialisation strategies, development of vocational education and training, including at higher qualification levels (EQF levels 5-8) in line with national context and provide innovative services such as clusters and business incubators for start-ups and technology innovation for SMEs, as well as innovative reskilling solutions for workers at risk of redundancy.

The report 'Mapping of Centres of Vocational Excellence' (October 2019)<sup>6</sup> refers to vocational excellence as a set of activities and a general approach to VET that 'go beyond what VET would normally be expected to do'. Thus, vocational excellence might be viewed as not just 'getting the core things right' but reaching out into new areas.

The CoVE initiative supports a bottom-up approach to vocational excellence involving a wide range of local stakeholders. It enables VET institutions to rapidly adapt skills provision to evolving economic and social needs, including the digital and green transitions. CoVEs operate in a given local context, being the linchpin of skills ecosystems for innovation, regional development, and social inclusion, while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks.<sup>7</sup>

Vocational excellence is characterised by a **holistic learner centred** approach in which VET:

- Is an integrated part of **skills ecosystems**<sup>8</sup>, contributing to regional development, innovation, smart specialisation and clusters strategies, as well as to specific value chains and industrial ecosystems<sup>9</sup>
- Is part of **knowledge triangles**, working closely with other education and training sectors, the scientific community, the creative sector, and business
- Enables learners to acquire both **vocational** (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 continuous professional development of teaching and training staff, innovative pedagogies, learner and staff mobility and VET internationalisation strategies.

CoVE are working to bring together a wide range of local partners such as VET providers (at both secondary and tertiary levels), employers, chambers, research centres, development agencies, employment services, and social partners, to co-create the above mentioned 'skills ecosystems'. CoVE can act as knowledge and innovation hubs for companies (particularly SMEs), while working with centres in other countries through EU-wide collaborative networks.

## 2.2 Networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence

The European Commission has launched an initiative to establish transnational **Networks of Centres of Vocational Excellence** with the support of the Erasmus+ programme. The CoVE Network initiative

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2021). JRC Technical Report. Support services for Centres of Vocational Excellence. Scoping report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 5

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2019). Mapping of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training (VET). <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8250&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>7</sup> Cf: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1501>

<sup>8</sup> **Skill ecosystems** are defined as regional or sectoral social formations in which human capability is developed and deployed for productive purposes (Finegold 1999). Their basic elements are business settings and associated business models, institutional/policy frameworks, modes of engaging labour, the structure of jobs, as well as the level of skills and systems for their formation (Buchanan et al. 2001). See [https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/58001/26/Buchanan\\_et\\_al\\_OUP\\_2016\\_Skills\\_ecosystems.pdf](https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/58001/26/Buchanan_et_al_OUP_2016_Skills_ecosystems.pdf) and <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A12460>

<sup>9</sup> See **14 industrial ecosystems** as described in Commission Communication on Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-industrial-strategy-update-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-industrial-strategy-update-2020_en.pdf), as well as the SWD(2021) 351, Annual Single Market Report 2021 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/annual-single-market-report-2021.pdf>

helps to connect VET centres at national as well as the international level, thereby introducing a European dimension to vocational excellence:

- At **national level** involving a wide range of local stakeholders creating skills ecosystems for local innovation, regional development, and social inclusion, while working with CoVEs in other countries through international collaborative networks.
- At **international level** bringing together CoVEs that share a common interest in:
  - specific sectors or industrial ecosystems<sup>10</sup>,
  - innovative approaches to tackle societal challenges (e.g. climate change, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, sustainable development goals, integration of migrants, upskilling people with low qualification levels, etc.), or
  - innovative approaches to increase the outreach, quality and effectiveness of existing CoVEs.

### 2.3 Erasmus funding 2019-2020

The development of these Networks was initially supported by two rounds of Erasmus funded pilot projects through calls for proposals in 2019 and 2020. The Erasmus+ funded projects in the period 2019-2020 have contributed to skills ecosystems that support innovation, regional development and Smart Specialisation. They are drivers for a reinforced collaboration between stakeholders, they have worked with local communities and laid the ground for sustainable partnerships. Table 1.1 below gives an overview on the CoVE Networks selected from the 2019 and 2020 Erasmus Call. The 2020 projects were asked to include relevant deliverables linked to activities and services typically provided by CoVEs and the ones highlighted in grey indicated quality assurance as among their set of activities.

The Commission also plans to roll out the initiative on a larger scale in the new multi-annual financial framework, proposing a budget allocation of at least €200million under the Erasmus programme 2021-2027.

**Table 1.1 Overview on the 2019/2020 CoVE Networks**

Project Lead Country	2019 Selection of CoVE Networks (2019-2020)	2020 Selection of CoVE Networks (2021-2027)
Austria		<a href="#">GREENOVET</a> (European VET Excellence Platform for Green Innovation), coordinated by FH Joanneum GmbH, AT
Bulgaria		<a href="#">European Centre of Vocational Excellence in Microelectronics</a> , (ECOVEM) coordinated by Technical University of Sofia BG
Finland	<a href="#">DIHUB</a> (Digital Innovation Hub for Cloud Based Services), coordinated by Helsinki Business College (HBC) (FI)	
Germany		<a href="#">Three-level Centers of Professional Excellence: Qualification, Entrepreneurship and Innovation</a> in the Green Economy (3-loe), coordinated by Hanse Parlament e.V., DE
Italy	<a href="#">DEUS</a> (Open Design School), coordinated by Foundation Matera-Basilicata (IT)	<a href="#">Governance for Inclusive Vocational Excellence (GIVE)</a> , coordinated by Cometa Formazione Sociata Cooperativa Sociale, IT
Slovenia	<a href="#">TALENT JOURNEY</a> (Platform for CDS VET Excellence), coordinated by Šolski Centre Nova Gorica, Slovenia	
Spain	<a href="#">EXAM 4.0</a> (Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing), coordinated by TKNIKA (ES)	<a href="#">Alliance of Centres of Vocational Excellence in the Furniture and Wood Sector (ALLVIEW)</a> , coordinated by Asociacion Empresearial de Investigacion Centro

<sup>10</sup> ibid

Project Lead Country	2019 Selection of CoVE Networks (2019-2020)	2020 Selection of CoVE Networks (2021-2027)
		Tecnologico del Mueble y la Madera de la Region de Murcia, ES
The Netherlands	<a href="#">PoVE Water</a> (Platform of Vocational Excellence), coordinated by CIV Water (NL)	<a href="#">European Platform for Urban Greening</a> , coordinated by Stichting Wellant, NL
Norway		Blue Region Initiatives for Developing Growth, Employability and Skills in the farming of Finfish, coordinated by Trondelag Fylkeskommune, NO

It should be noted that some countries (incl. Greece and France) have set up national initiatives related to Vocational Excellence with support from DG REFORM. These initiatives refer to the 'CoVE spirit' and aim to establish strategic and systematic dialogue with stakeholders and social partners, and raise the quality of the VET (e.g. through pilot curricula, modern methods of teaching etc.). In addition, there are similar initiatives in many countries that are also relevant, although they are not necessarily called CoVE and do not receive EU funding.

## 2.4 Quality assurance of CoVE

The notion of 'vocational excellence' applied in CoVE is multidimensional. This implies that quality assurance can be discussed with relation to various aspects, including

- Excellence in VET teaching and training (including work-based learning)
- National collaboration with stakeholders
- International (EU-wide) collaboration through CoVE Networks.

As stated above, the 2020 VET recommendation calls for the Quality Assurance National Reference Points 'to inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework.' A discussion of how to plan, implement, evaluate and review the work related to the CoVE objectives, and the role of EQAVET, might prove useful to support the work of CoVE going forward.

## 3. Relevance of the EQAVET framework for the QA of CoVE

EQAVET offers a framework that has proven useful for quality assurance in VET provision, and it needs to be explored in how far elements of the EQAVET framework are being used (and can be further developed and adopted) for QA in CoVE projects, and what are the experiences in the 2019-2020 projects.

The EQAVET framework contains several indicative descriptors in all four quality areas of the EQAVET cycle<sup>11</sup> that specifically relate to the key CoVE objectives. These are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.2 EQAVET indicative descriptors related to CoVE objectives**

Quality area	VET system level	VET provider level
<b>Planning</b> reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social partners and all other relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels</li> <li>■ Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify the training needs of the labour market and society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ongoing consultation with social partners and all other relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs</li> <li>■ Providers plan cooperative initiatives with relevant stakeholders The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b> plans are devised in consultation with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Relevant and inclusive partnerships, including those between teachers and</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 2020 VET Recommendation, Annex 2, pp 417/12-417/14

Quality area	VET system level	VET provider level
stakeholders and include explicit principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>other relevant stakeholders at the different levels</li> <li>VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trainers, are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned</li> <li>The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers</li> <li>Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance</li> <li>VET providers promote innovation in teaching and learning methods, in school and in the workplace, supported by the use of digital technologies and online-learning tools</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b> of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described</li> <li>The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education and training including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction</li> </ul>
<b>Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined and used to improve the quality of provision at all levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers', trainers' and all other relevant stakeholders' feedback this is used to inform further actions</li> <li>Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation, support the development of high-quality provision, and improve opportunities for learners.</li> <li>Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place</li> </ul>

Out of the ten EQAVET indicators<sup>12</sup>, the following ones seems to be of particular relevance in the context of CoVEs:

- Indicator 5: *Placement rate in VET programmes: a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria; b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.* This is an outcome indicator that can help to understand how VET supports employability of graduates, and how well VET responds to the changing demands in the labour market (and can be adapted, including for disadvantaged groups).
- Indicator 6: *Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria b)*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 2020 VET Recommendation, Annex 2, pp 417/14-417/16. As CoVEs are supposed to enhance attractiveness and take-up of VET, Indicator 3: *Participation rate in VET programmes* could also be of interest.



*satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.* This is an outcome indicator that delivers qualitative and quantitative information on long-term career perspectives of VET graduates.

- Indicator 9: *Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels b) evidence of the use of such mechanisms and their effectiveness.* This is a context/input indicator that delivers qualitative information in view of achieving the strategic goals of 'improved responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market' and 'employability of VET graduates'.

#### 4. Adopting the EQAVET framework for the QA of CoVE

The indicators and indicative descriptors listed above can provide an entry point for discussing the usefulness of the EQAVET framework for the QA of CoVE. Yet, the national collaboration dimension of CoVEs requires the realisation of abstract concepts like 'skills ecosystems', 'regional development', 'innovation', 'smart specialisation strategies' etc., which can prove to be difficult to operationalise and measure. In addition, the international collaboration offers another layer of complexity.

This section presents a first consideration of how the EQAVET framework could be used for the quality assurance CoVEs at national level and for CoVE Networks across countries. This could be the basis for discussion between CoVE projects and the EQAVET Network on defining specific guidelines for CoVE projects to adopt the EQAVET descriptors.

##### 4.1 EQAVET indicative descriptors

###### Planning

The EQAVET indicative indicator refers to the participation of or consultation with 'social partners and all other relevant stakeholders' for identifying needs and setting goals and objectives. *Who are these 'relevant stakeholders' in the context of CoVEs?*

At national level, CoVEs involve a wide range of local stakeholders creating skills ecosystems for local innovation, regional development, and social inclusion. Thus, they establish strong partnerships at local or regional level, which may include initial and continuing or higher VET providers, higher education institutions including universities of applied sciences and polytechnics, research institutions, science parks, companies, chambers and their associations, social partners, sectoral skills councils, professional/sector associations, national and regional authorities and development agencies, public employment services, etc. In cross-national collaborations, they can cooperate with CoVEs from other countries based on their common interest. In this case, an even wider group of stakeholders needs to be considered.

The EQAVET indicative indicator also refers to the establishment of *mechanisms and procedures to identify the training needs of the labour market and society.* These mechanisms are very relevant for CoVEs as they aim at providing people with labour market relevant skills including those necessary for the green and digital transitions. As one of the success factors identified for CoVEs is being firmly anchored into the frameworks of regional development, innovation and smart specialisation, they are being an active partner in co-creating solutions for local social and economic development and their VET offer is informed by skills (labour market) intelligence.

Through international cooperation, CoVEs can work together to jointly identify training needs across countries and learn from each other's approaches. They can also develop joint programmes, micro-credentials and 'European Vocational Core Profiles'.

###### Implementation

The EQAVET indicative descriptor, for example, refers to *continuous development of teachers' competences, to partnerships between teachers and trainers, and to the promotion of innovation in teaching and learning methods.* As CoVEs are engaged in reciprocal and mutually beneficial interactions at local or regional level, they can make use of opportunities offered by their partners and can, for example, join forces with other organisations (e.g. companies) in a private-public partnership. Teachers can update their technical competences by doing internships in companies or in joint research hubs. Innovative learning methods (including MOOC's, simulators, virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence and



other methods suitable to foster learner excellence through actions that incentive VET learners to explore their innovation and creative potential) can also be developed in cooperation with partners (e.g. higher education institutions). Teachers also have the opportunity to update their pedagogical competences and in particular their digital skills including those necessary for online and distance learning.

In particular the use of digital technologies and online-learning tools support the international cooperation in CoVE Networks in the implementation phase. These networks also offer the opportunity for international (virtual or personal) mobilities of students and teachers.

### **Evaluation**

The EQAVET indicative indicator refers to *evaluation of processes and results of education and training, including learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction*. As CoVEs are embedded in partnerships with various stakeholders at national and international level, they are also included in the evaluation processes. CoVEs have effective feedback loops and graduate tracking systems in place that enable the timely adaptation of learning provision to evolving labour market needs.

### **Review**

The EQAVET indicative indicator refers to the *definition and use of procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews and improve the quality of provision at all levels*. CoVEs have such procedures in place that can even shorten or speed up the time it usually takes to adjust VET provision in response to needs in the labour market. This should allow them, for example, to adapt to the constant evolution of technologies in industry and quickly respond to companies' demands for new competences or professional profiles and are capable of rapidly adapting skills provision to evolving needs. CoVEs involve the stakeholders of their network in the strategic learning process for developing appropriate action plans and putting them in place.

### **4.1 EQAVET indicators**

Several of the indicators suggested to support the evaluation and quality improvement of national/regional VET systems and/or VET providers when implementing the EQAVET framework can also be used by CoVEs. This section aims at briefly discussing how these indicators could be linked to the specific goals of CoVEs.

Indicator 5 (*Placement rate in VET programmes*) refers to the outcome of a VET programme. For CoVEs, it would be interesting to elaborate to what extent their approach (collaborating with a wide range of local stakeholders in co-creating skills ecosystems for local innovation, regional development, and social inclusion) supports VET graduates in finding a job. What is the concrete impact of their approach and how can this be measured?

Indicator 6 (*Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace*) refers to the match between the skills acquired and the requirements of the workplace. As CoVEs are embedded in a local or regional network, they could develop and apply measures to monitor this over time. In doing so, they could also investigate the extent to which graduates have acquired the necessary competences to identify any upskilling needs themselves.

Indicator 9 (*Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market*) can mean for CoVEs, for example, to develop and apply in collaboration with their national and international partners skills intelligence methods that continuously support them in keeping their VET offer responsive to changing demands.

## **5. Further potential QA measures for CoVEs**

This section briefly introduces some potential quality measures that could be used by or developed for CoVEs and CoVE Networks.

### **Peer review concept at provider level**

In recent years, a handbook for transnational peer reviews at VET provider level has been developed in the EQAVET context: 'European Peer Review. Quality Areas and Criteria for VET'.<sup>13</sup> 'A peer review is a form of external evaluation that supports the reviewed VET provider in its quality assurance efforts through a dynamic and motivating process of mutual learning that benefits both VET providers and peers. During peer reviews, colleagues from other VET providers (called peers) assess and provide feedback on the quality of VET provision to the reviewed provider. Transnational peer reviews involve international peers that assess VET providers alongside national peers' (p. 5).

In the development of quality areas, criteria and indicators, consideration has been given to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET and its additional components (EQAVET+) and the current change in the operating environment of education and training.

For international peer reviews, the 15 quality areas that relate to the core activities of VET have been developed. Each quality area includes a quality cycle review (planning, implementation, evaluation and review). It is up to the VET provider to choose the quality areas and the criteria and indicators based on its own development objectives that it wishes to subject to peer review.

The figure below presents an overview over the 15 quality areas:<sup>14</sup>

## Peer review methodology

**PEER REVIEWS RELY ON** quality areas (QA), each defining the corresponding criteria, indicators and sources of evidence. VET providers can select the criteria and indicators that suit their development goals and needs. For transnational peer reviews, the following quality areas have been developed:

QA 1	Strategic planning and development	QA 10	Internationalisation
QA 2	Quality assurance	QA 11	Pedagogical framework and planning the pedagogical processes
QA 3	Knowledge management	QA 12	Teaching and learning
QA 4	Management and leadership	QA 13	Work-based learning (WBL) outside the school
QA 5	Management of infrastructure, facilities and finances	QA 14	Assessment and certification
QA 6	Planning and management of human resources	QA 15	Learning results and outcomes
QA 7	Equality and equal opportunities		
QA 8	Internal relations		
QA 9	External relations		

The methodology builds on the initial peer review concept developed in the Leonardo da Vinci project Peer Review as an Instrument for Quality Assurance and Improvement in Initial VET. The methodology has been revised in line with new developments in VET and in consideration of the EQARF and EQAVET+.

### Application of international QA instruments<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This handbook has been produced as part of the EU funded projects to support the operations of the quality assurance national reference points for VET (EQAVET NRPs). The development work on peer review criteria has been carried out as a joint project by the NRPs of Croatia, Estonia, Finland and Slovenia from 2019–2021 (Quality Areas 1–10), following the earlier project by the NRPs of Austria, Croatia, Finland and Slovenia from 2017–2019 (Quality Areas 11–15). -

[https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/European\\_Peer\\_Review\\_Quality\\_Areas\\_and\\_Criteria\\_for\\_Vocational\\_Education\\_and\\_Training\\_VET.pdf#:~:text=WHAT%20IS%20A%20PEER%20REVIEW%20A%20peer%20review,learning%20that%20benefits%20both%20VET%20providers%20and%20peers.](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/European_Peer_Review_Quality_Areas_and_Criteria_for_Vocational_Education_and_Training_VET.pdf#:~:text=WHAT%20IS%20A%20PEER%20REVIEW%20A%20peer%20review,learning%20that%20benefits%20both%20VET%20providers%20and%20peers.)

<sup>14</sup> Vacker, R. (2021). Updated criteria for peer reviews. European Peer Review. Quality Areas and Criteria for VET. EQAVET Annual Network Meeting, online 1-2. June 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Information based on the background paper for the EQAVET Peer Learning Activity on Quality Assurance in continuing vocational education and training (CVET), 27-28 April 2020



CoVEs may consider working towards the certification of education and training providers based on standards developed by relevant national and/or international standards organisations. The most common set of standards include ISO Management System Standards or EFQM quality systems which tend to focus on ensuring customer satisfaction, good stakeholder relations and improving business results by focusing on the quality of processes and of management:

- **ISO 9001**<sup>16</sup>: This standard defines requirements for creating, implementing, and maintaining a Quality Management Systems (QMS). It is often a precondition for further recognition and certification – for instance, to be recognized as public services provider or to participate in public acquisition procedures.
- **ISO 21001**<sup>17</sup>: This standard describes requirements and guidance for implementing Management Systems for Educational Organisations. It includes the concept of 'learner and beneficiary satisfaction', integrates requirements specific to learning design and operations while also referencing relevant standards around social and environmental responsibility.
- The **EFQM excellence model**<sup>18</sup>: This is a framework for organizational management, based on total quality management (TQM) and designed to help organizations in managing change and improving performance and competitiveness, by understanding the relations of cause and effects between what organisations do and the results they achieve.

The EQAVET Network was already engaged in comparing the EQAVET framework with the EFQM Excellence Model and the ISO 9001 standard to identify common elements, redundancies, synergies and gaps. 'The conclusion of this analysis was that the background/principles, the goals & objectives, the perspective (stakeholder needs and satisfaction) and the methodology used (the PDCA cycle) are common. ISO 21001 includes an annex that maps its criteria against EQAVET, allowing for it to be used as a way to implement EQAVET.'

Other international standards that could be adopted include ISO 17024 (specifies requirements for bodies operating certification of persons and requires strict separation between teaching and examination)<sup>19</sup>, quality management corresponding to ISO 9001 (specifies requirements for a quality management system)<sup>20</sup> and ISO 29993 (specifies requirements for a learning service provider outside formal education)<sup>21</sup>.

### Quality label

In 2015, EVTA, the European Vocational Training Association, a network representing VET providers across Europe, has launched an initiative to promote VET through improving the training delivery, and thus to boost employability of people. This also includes the development of a VET Quality Label<sup>22</sup>.



EVTA is now also working on a quality label for CoVEs based partly on the experience from two Erasmus+ projects: ETTE (KA2) and SOLITY (KA3) (see table below)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html>

<sup>18</sup> relations of cause and effects between what organisations do and the results they achieve.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/52993.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.iso.org/standard/70357.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.evta.eu/highlights/evta-quality-label/>

**Table 1.3 EVTA projects**

Project	Brief description
<b>SOLITY</b> – VET SOcial utiliTY Monitor (ERASMUS+ KA3 – Support for Policy Reform, Forward-Looking Cooperation) 2018-2020	The aim of the project was to set up a solid, shared and transferable model to measure VET social utility, based on a specific pool of qualitative and quantitative indicators. The definition of these indicators was based upon what is already in place in the field of quality systems for VET, both at transnational (EQAVET, ISO) and national (Accreditation systems, AFPA model) level. <a href="https://www.solityproject.eu/">https://www.solityproject.eu/</a>
<b>ETTE</b> – European Trainers’ Training for Excellence (ERASMUS+ KA2 – Strategic Partnership for the Exchange of Good Practices) 2018-2021	The project aimed at enhancing structural synergies and cooperation among VET centres of excellence with a view to fostering the local dimension of quality along with the continuous professional development of teachers and trainers. ETTE project pursues the exchange of good practices among European VET providers which are recognised as Centres of Excellence (VCEs). The project aimed to do so by consolidating and enlarging the VCEs network with new organisations to consolidate and spread its model along with the VET quality and excellence principles all over Europe. <a href="https://www.evta.eu/highlights/ette/">https://www.evta.eu/highlights/ette/</a>

The report on ‘Support services for Centres of Vocational Excellence’ (European Commission, 2021, p. 29) suggests that the ‘support services could continue to build on this knowledge and experience to develop a specific quality label for vocational excellence, which would be tested and adopted by the CoVE platforms. These forms of quality assurance could address both individual competences of learners as well as institutions. The overall framework for a CoVE label could be based around different dimensions, such as:

- Discipline focused (strategic thematic area – national accreditation-assessed)
- Market focused (put ideas into action through EntreComp, DigComp & LifeComp)
- Institution focused (duplicating replicable VET innovation at the institutional)
- Societal focused (providing problem-based solutions to societal issues).’

## 6. Guiding questions for the event

The guiding questions for discussion during the event include:

- What are the plans and intentions of CoVE Networks selected in 2020 in relation to the different aspects of QA (provider level/collaboration)? To which extent do the different VET providers in a CoVE Network accept and trust each other’s QA arrangements? What inputs/outputs/outcomes do these QA measure focus on? What challenges do they anticipate or experience in this regard?
- What are the successful examples of QA of CoVE / CoVE Networks (in relation to the provider as such and the specific CoVE objectives, hence the collaborative dimension) from the 2019 and 2020 pilot projects? What are the major learning points? Are there any quality areas where QA appears to be underdeveloped?
- To what extent are any international QA instruments (e.g. EFQM, ISO 21001 and 29993) applied in CoVEs?
- What can be learned from initiatives like the EVTA quality label, and the EQAVET peer review concept at provider level?
- How can CoVE / CoVE Networks draw on the work done by the EQAVET network? What examples exist for the use of the EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors? What results are available and can be used? Which specific guidelines can be developed for CoVE projects to adopt the EQAVET descriptors
- What could be the role of EQAVET for CoVE / CoVE Networks in the future?

## 7. Annex: Brief introduction of CoVE Networks that will present their QA approach

QA in CoVE, example - 2019 project:

- [EXAM 4.0](#) (Excellence in Advanced Manufacturing), coordinated by TKNIKA (ES): The project will establish a platform of excellent advanced manufacturing VET centres. The EXAM 4.0 hub aims at becoming a reference in skills governance in the participating regions/countries and at European



level, setting up European regional skills ecosystems that bring together VET/HVET centres, companies, policy makers and individual lifelong learners.

QA in CoVE, examples - 2020 projects:

- [European Centre of Vocational Excellence in Microelectronics](#), (ECOVEM) coordinated by Technical University of Sofia (BG): The project will establish a European Cooperation platform of Vocational Excellence in Microelectronics to tackle the challenges of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, green technologies, gender equality and technology, and the integration of migrants. The project will implement innovative instructional approaches towards life-long capacity to self-regulate learning, hard skills and soft skills using the ecosystems-based theoretical models and performance support systems.
- [European Platform for Urban Greening](#), coordinated by Stichting Wellant (NL): The project aims to increase the knowledge and skills required to address biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in the urban green living environment, and to broaden the expertise among professionals in Europe. The project specifically addresses the development of innovative curricula and teaching methodologies in the field of urban green landscaping, in order to raise the quality and adaptability of the skills ecosystem.