



## Peer Learning Activity *on Promoting Visibility and Rising Awareness of VET processes*

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Background Paper

### Context

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The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009)<sup>1</sup> on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) invited Member States to improve their VET systems, through the use of a quality assurance and improvement cycle based on planning, implementation, evaluation and review. EQAVET is a framework that allows individual Member States to develop arrangements which meet their requirements in a way that increases trust, transparency and mobility, at national and EU levels. EQAVET can be applied both at VET-system and VET-provider levels, and is supported by quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators. It provides a systematic approach to quality assurance and emphasizes the importance of monitoring and improving quality by combining internal self-monitoring, external processes and qualitative analysis. It covers all aspects of VET (formal, informal and non-formal) in both the initial and continuing sectors.

Qualitative and quantitative information on the introduction and use of the EQAVET Recommendation in EU Member States is now available from several sources. These are: the [Report of the Commission to the EU Parliament and Council](#) in 2014; the [external evaluation of EQAVET](#) undertaken by ICF-GHK in 2013; and the results of the EQAVET [Secretariat survey 2013-2014](#).

One of the main aims of all EU policies on VET is, from the very beginning of the Copenhagen process, **increasing visibility and awareness regarding VET**. The main reason for this focus is that, in many countries, "vocational education and training (VET) suffers from an image problem. Lack of investment, limited quality management and "dead ends" in terms of progression pathways have contributed to a negative perception of the sector and a reticence from learners to choose a VET programme. Current EU education and training policy recognises this issue and improving the quality and attractiveness of VET is therefore a key priority"<sup>2</sup>. Taking into account that "by 2020, European VET systems should be more attractive, relevant, career-oriented, innovative, accessible and flexible than in 2010, and should contribute to excellence and equity in lifelong learning"<sup>3</sup>, more measures need to be taken and the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (QANRPs) have an obvious role in this regard. For instance, the 2013-2014 EQAVET Secretariat Survey<sup>4</sup> shows that

<sup>1</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> Making IVET more attractive for learners. Results of the work undertaken by the thematic group on Making VET more attractive. ENQA-VET, 2009 -

[http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/2009\\_Publications/Making\\_initial\\_vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_IVET\\_more\\_attractive\\_for\\_learners.sflb.ashx](http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/2009_Publications/Making_initial_vocational_education_and_training_IVET_more_attractive_for_learners.sflb.ashx)

<sup>3</sup> The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020 [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/statistics.aspx>

more than ¾ of the QANRPs have such responsibilities related with the visibility of VET and with raising stakeholders' awareness regarding these issues:

<b>RESPONSIBILITIES of NRPs and the EQAVET RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percentages</b>
Keeping stakeholders informed about the activities of the EQAVET network	26	90%
Providing active support for the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET network	25	86%
Taking concrete initiatives to promote further development of the EQAVET Framework in the national context	23	79%
Ensuring that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively	25	86%
Supporting training providers to identify areas for improvement to QA and implement QA systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation	21	72%
Supporting training providers to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems	20	69%

The aim of EQAVET PLAs is to create an opportunity for discussion, reflection, and for sharing knowledge and experience among participants that can feed into the work of the Network in the area of concern. The discussion are informed and prompted by the presentation of experiences from European Member States: Austria, Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia and Romania.

The Peer Learning Activity will enable participants to share information and lessons learned and to enhance cooperation in order to make VET more attractive.

The PLA is organized by the Romanian National Centre for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, which ensures the secretariat of the Romanian QANRP, and is co-financed by the European Commission (within the restricted call for the QANRPs – EACEA 46/2015).

## Introduction to the topic

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One of the main purposes of the quality assurance mechanisms, systems and tools (EQAVET included), is “to contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning”. The development of new VET policies and their relevance for the labour market and for the overall society depends on the trust society itself invest in VET. The trust in VET, at its turn, is correlated with its visibility and social prestige.

In this respect, a study published in 2009<sup>5</sup> defines several conditions for VET attractiveness for learners: quality management, labour market relevance, progression pathways, status and image, information and guidance and the existence of competent learning facilitators. Another study, published by CEDEFOP in 2014<sup>6</sup> identifies exogenous and endogenous drivers affecting VET outcomes and, therefore, attractiveness of VET (wider economic determinants, wider social determinants, personal expectations, availability of information etc.).

The VET visibility and prestige and the need for a constant effort for awareness rising at social level regarding the importance of VET are issues widely tackled at international, supra-European level as well. For instance, the UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) published, in 2014, a synthesis of the international bibliography on this issue<sup>7</sup>. This paper makes an inventory of some of the most relevant issues influencing the visibility of VET.

**For the purpose of this specific PLA we tried to make a selection of relevant factors, which are both relevant for the topic, but less approached in similar events.**

The first one is the **attractiveness** itself, but defined as the "capacity of vocational education and training to encourage individuals to deliberately choose vocational and training education and training, to offer quality qualifications that open up career prospects, and to persuade employers to recruit holders of TVET certificates". This definition makes visible both sides of the attractiveness. The first one is the VET demand, from the employers' side, the question being how they are encouraged to offer jobs with high career status and perspectives for socially highly praised careers. The second side is the VET offer, the individuals embracing VET careers, the main question being if VET is the first choice or it is considered as a "failure route". The value given by the employers, by individuals and by the public opinion has deep cultural roots, therefore it is extremely hard to overcome.

The second factor affecting visibility is **the transferability or permeability**: VET is attractive if the competencies acquired are used not only for one workplace, but also when one change the workplace and even the sector, not only for the existing workplace but along the whole career. The transferability/permeability is defined as the "capacity (of skills and competences) to be transferred to and used in a new occupational or educational environment". In this respect, the so called "key competencies" or "transversal competencies" are considered as highly important.

Starting from the fluidity of the labour market, VET is or may become visible and attractive when people are moving across workplaces and sectors, at national and international levels. **Mobility** commonly refers to the "movement of members of the labour force between areas or industries. In a globalized context, and for our purpose, international mobility refers to the ability of an individual to

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<sup>5</sup> "Making IVET more attractive for learners. Results of the work undertaken by the thematic group on Making VET more attractive" -

[http://www.egavet.eu/Libraries/2009\\_Publications/Making\\_initial\\_vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_IVET\\_more\\_attractive\\_for\\_learners.sflb.ashx](http://www.egavet.eu/Libraries/2009_Publications/Making_initial_vocational_education_and_training_IVET_more_attractive_for_learners.sflb.ashx)

<sup>6</sup> CEDEFOP - RESEARCH PAPER. No 39. Attractiveness of initial vocational education and training: identifying what matters. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014

[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/IVET\\_Review\\_08.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/IVET_Review_08.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> We define "attractiveness", "permeability", "mobility" and "school to work transition" accordingly "SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY. Attractiveness of vocational education and training. Permeability, successful school-to-work transitions and international mobility. Editors: Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) / UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 2014"

<http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=Online+library&skin=&lang=&akt=id&st=&qs=5642&unevoc=1>

move and adapt to a new occupational environment, or the improved access of learners to education and training institutions across countries".

Both transferability and mobility in VET are highly correlated with the **relevance** of VET qualifications for the labour market.

Smooth **school-to-work transition**, defined as "the move from education or training to employment, covering the period between leaving education and entering the labour market" may increase VET attractiveness and visibility: high levels of quick employability for VET graduates will increase, for all stakeholders, the trust in VET. In the context of lifelong learning and life wide learning there will be a lot of circumstances requiring active workers to come back to school, to update knowledge and to upgrade skills, in order to face new challenges of the existing or future workplaces. Thus, we may add, as well, the dimension of **work-to-school transition**.

To these four dimensions of "VET attractiveness", as mentioned in the UNESCO/UNEVOC documents, we added two more, embedded in all VET EU policies and relevant for the diversity of the EU VET systems and of stakeholders represented in this PLA.

The first one is the **stakeholders' involvement** – the way VET provider and public authorities and/or regulators may and must cooperate with the social partners and with other stakeholders (e.g. students' associations, universities, local administration) in order to increase VET visibility. The second one is the **international cooperation in VET** and, in the context of this PLA, we will discuss, as well, the ways to increase the role of QANRPs in this regard.

## Questions for the PLA: topics and methodology

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The PLA is organised around the six topics described above, as issued from relevant literature. Each of the six topics will be covered in one session of 90 minutes and will have, as starting point, a case study provided by participants or guest speakers:

1. VET attractiveness.
2. Permeability in VET.
3. National and transnational mobility in VET.
4. Stakeholders' involvement – mainly employers' unions and trade unions.
5. School to work and work to school transition in VET.
6. International cooperation in VET and the role of QANRPs in this regard.

In order to avoid boredom, the case study introducing the topic will last no longer than 20 minutes, in order to give more time for reflection and interaction among participants. For the same reason, the methodology used will be different from a session to another. We will use different group work methods and techniques - such as brainstorming, "snowball" groups, "*tour de galerie*", "coffee tables" etc.

Before approaching the topics of the PLA, there will be an introductory session and, at the end, a concluding one, summarizing the main lessons learned and devising a common "to-do" list for the QANRPs involved.

**For each of the topics the participants will be asked to bring their own experiences, to share best practices, problems and solutions for these problems. In order to ignite reflection, each of the 6 topics will have, as “starter”, several adjacent questions and pointers (presented below).**

**Theme 1: How to increase VET attractiveness?**

- Why is VET unattractive, for individuals, in some countries and attractive in others?
- What kind of programmes and measures may increase VET attractiveness for individuals?
- How companies may be encouraged to give VET a higher value?
- What public authorities and/or regulators may do in this respect, in order to make VET more visible?

Pointers: VET status in the society; concerns regarding VET; perceived usefulness of VET; visibility of VET in media – “positive” or “negative”.

**Theme 2: How to increase permeability in VET?**

- Which competencies ensure a higher permeability in VET?
- Which is the role of key competencies in ensuring permeability of VET?
- What public authorities and/or regulators may do in this respect, in order to make VET more visible?

Pointers: key / transversal competencies; credit systems; trust among employers and VET providers; mutual trust and recognition tools among sectors.

**Theme 3: How to increase national and transnational mobility in VET?**

- Which competencies ensure a higher national mobility in VET?
- Which competencies ensure a higher international mobility in VET?
- Are there sectors with higher mobility than others? What factors ensure higher mobility in VET at national and/or international level?

Pointers: adaptability; flexibility; national and international mobility at sector level; national and international mobility among sectors.

**Theme 4: How to ensure involvement and participation of stakeholders (mainly employers' unions and of trade-unions) in increasing visibility of VET?**

- How employers' unions and trade unions may be motivated to ensure a higher visibility of VET?
- What kind of participation is suitable for social partners? In policy making? In curriculum development? In assessment and certification? Other ways of participation?
- What other stakeholders may be involved, in order to increase VET visibility?

Pointers: social partners; other stakeholders (students' associations, universities, local administration etc.); VET design, delivery and assessment.

**Theme 5: How to ensure school to work and work to school transition in VET?**

- Which are the most effective ways of induction (school-to-work transition)?
- Who are the main actors in this process?
- What circumstances may require “work-to-school” transition?

Pointers: induction; mentoring/coaching/tutoring; work place specificity; changes at the workplace level.

**Theme 6: How to enhance international cooperation in VET and how to build effective networks?**

- How VET may become more attractive using national and international networking?

- Which is the role of the QANRPs in establishing and developing networks?
- How to enhance cooperation among QANRPs? What EQAVET Network may do in this regard?

Pointers: effective networks; networking criteria; the QANRPs and the EQAVET Network.

The participants will be required to find answers for these questions but also to find other issues and questions. These answers, issues and new questions will shape the content of the Policy Brief, which will be prepared by the Romanian QANRP following this PLA.