2016 EQAVET FORUM – SUPPORTING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, 7 DECEMBER 2016

Introduction

1. As part of the European Vocational Skills Week, the EQAVET Forum took place on 7 December 2016 in Brussels. It was attended by 90 participants from 23 EU countries. Many participants were attending an EQAVET event for the first time and 26 registered for the one-hour workshop on 'an introduction to EQAVET' at the start of the day.

2. The Forum was designed to enable policy makers, vocational education and training (VET) practitioners, associations of VET providers, social partners and EQAVET users to reflect on how their approaches and experience of working with quality assurance systems based on EQAVET could contribute to the development of excellence in VET.

3. During the day there were presentations from representatives from four EQAVET national reference points; the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat; the European social partners; and one employer. In addition each participant attended three workshops. Copies of all the presentations and conclusions form the workshop discussions are available on the EQAVET Secretariat's web-site at http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/EQAVET-Forum.aspx

4. As part of the introduction to the Forum, the Commission outlined what was happening in the European Vocational Skills Week, and explained the 2017-2019 review process which will help to develop a strategic, European view for VET from 2020.

Key issues and challenges

5. The Forum considered how to:
    - strengthen VET providers' approaches to self-assessment;
    - track VET 'graduates' when they complete their training and move to employment or further study;
    - strengthen the quality assurance of work-based learning.

6. Each issue was discussed in a workshop and the findings were shared in a plenary session.

Solutions and good practice

7. There were two presentations which considered how an EQAVET national reference point (NRP) had used Erasmus+ funds to develop a national priority in partnership with other Member States. Romania had looked at ways to enhance the attractiveness of VET in a country where it is often seen as a second choice for parents and learners. Austria had investigated ways to involve front-line VET practitioners in quality assurance and identified how their involvement improved practice and enhanced the quality of provision.

8. The presentation from the Netherlands looked at how a VET tracking system is being used to track learners through the education system. Since 2005 learners have been assigned an 'education number' and this enables each provider and the system to analyse the progress of individuals and groups of individuals as they progress through the different education sectors of the education system from the age of four.

9. Finland has two approaches to evaluation:
   - an annual self-assessment process which is completed by each autonomous VET provider in line with their own priorities and using their preferred method;
   - a national evaluation of the self-assessment processes which are used by the VET providers. This exercise was completed in 2015 and will be repeated in 2019.

10. The joint presentation from ETUC and UEAPME looked at the quality assurance of apprenticeship programmes and considered how to make them more cost effective and assure the quality of provision.

Recommendations

11. During the discussions on the design and implementation of a VET tracking system, the following key issues were raised:
    - the importance of ensuring the data from VET providers can be collated and is compatible with the data that is used at the system level covering all different education sectors (e.g. higher education, etc);
    - it takes a few years before a VET system has a sufficient amount of reliable data to make policy recommendations and improve practice;
    - graduate tracking has to supplement other approaches to quality assurance;
    - specialist staff are needed to analyse the tracking data as this ensures valid and reliable conclusions can be made;
    - a tracking system helps VET providers and those with responsibility for VET policy to make changes based on evidence;
    - tracking systems need to be secure in order that personal data is protected;
    - an effective VET graduate tracking system can be seen as a feature of a mature quality assurance system.

12. Participants also agreed that self-assessment of VET providers is a key aspect of quality assurance and an essential factor in contributing to a high quality VET which is attractive to learners.

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