



D8.4 Guide for the application of EU VET policies in the wood and furniture sector

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Reviewers	WOODWIZE (Internal), InnovaWood (internal), Giorgio Allulli (external EQAVET expert)
Authors	Massimiliano Rumignani (AMBIT), Julio Rodrigo (AMBIT), Jure Šuligoj, Darja Štarkl, Saša Grašič (CPI), Jeroen Doom (WOODWIZE), Luc Dhont (Sint Paulus school), Luigi Mettica (ASLAM), Jacqueline de Kok (HMC), Gregor Pfeifer (HDH), Patrycja Zaton (InnovaWood).

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Abbreviations

C-VET Continuous vocational education and training

C-VET: Continuous VET

ECTS: European credit transfer and accumulation system

ECVET: European Credits for Vocational Education and Training

EDC: European Digital credentials

EQAVET: European Quality Assurance for VET

EQF - The European Qualifications Framework

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institute

I-VET: Initial vocational education and training

LLL: Lifelong Learning

NOF: National Qualification Framework

TVET: Technical Vocational education and training

VET: Vocational education and training

1

Aims of this guide



1. Aims of this guide

The ALLVIEW project is a transnational cooperation platform that connects partners within the wood and furniture sector, with operational objectives on a regional, national and European level. With the ALLVIEW project, we aim at an innovative approach to modernise vocational education and training.

In this framework, we want to ensure a precise and common understanding among all sector stakeholders of the concepts and purposes of the EU VET policies. This is essential to achieve the key project aim to establish a network, supporting a better and modern VET system for the wood and furniture sector, that is able to respond to the labour market needs on knowledge, skills and competences on the medium and long term.

This guide strives to facilitate this precise and common understanding and to properly respond to the challenges posed by the need of creating an upgraded and continuously innovated VET offer for the furniture sector across the EU.

In summary, this guide aims to facilitate sector stakeholders (mainly VET providers and actors of EU countries VET regulatory systems) in the process of securing that the sector *VET provision responds to the requirements of the EU VET frameworks and principles*. But also, to *increase awareness among sector actors* of the relevance of the deployment of EQF and EQAVET principles and criteria in the sector training provision: how they facilitate to *increase the quality of the VET offer, facilitate mobility, transparency and recognition* across EU countries.

This guide is the result of the work part of the Work Packages focusing its attention on the quality assurance of the project implementation and deliverables, on the evaluation (internal and external) of these deliverables and their validation by sector different stakeholders.

The ALLVIEW partners consider it a key requirement that sector VET provision responds to the sectoral needs on knowledge and skills, but also satisfies all those requirements of EU VET policies and principles in order to improve the training model/system for the sector and thus provide specific sectorial training able to:

- Increase the sector qualifications transparency
- Increase the comparability of curricula among different countries and thus facilitate workers mobility across the EU
- Increase the permeability of the sector VET
- Facilitate the lifelong learning of the sector workers
- Attract youngsters by making the sector VET offer more attractive

EU VET policies and in specific EQAVET, EQF and core principles of ECVET framework (although the last ones are now applied through different instruments such as micro-credentials) related to flexibility are the basis to achieve all these objectives. But the reality shows that too often they are not properly understood by the different sector stakeholders, that are the key implementers, users and beneficiaries. So, the idea is to deliver a specific guide for all these stakeholders, able to facilitate them in the process of securing that the sector VET provision satisfies the requirements of all the EU VET frameworks and principles and enhance it to properly respond to the needs of the furniture sector labour markets in relation to knowledge, skills and competences.



There is a clear need for such specific practical guide, specifically targeting VET providers and sector social partners, helping them to better understand the aims and the practicalities of these instruments and thus enabling the construction of a more harmonized and higher quality VET provision in the wood and furniture sector across the EU.

This guide is the result of a collaborative work led by AMBIT, which has received the support of different project partners representing different types of sector stakeholders. Inputs from these actors that are playing different roles, have provided a clearer and better view of the variegated importance that the different EU instruments can supply to the different sector stakeholders/actors and how these can take advantage of their deployment within their own entities and across the VET national systems.

The content has a practical approach toward the EU VET policies instruments and special attention has been put on those practical aspects that can make the grade of the VET provision within the wood and furniture sector across the EU. In the guide there are several references to different existing documents that can provide more details about the different topics treated and information about the national situations.

2

Backgrounds on VET systems and typologies

2. Backgrounds on VET systems and VET typologies

2.1. Introduction

Vocational education and training (VET) usually starts after the end of the compulsory school, however it is not always like that, it depends on countries specific educational systems; it provides learners with essential skills enhancing their employability, supporting their personal development and encouraging active citizenship. VET boosts enterprise performance, competitiveness, research and innovation.

VET systems in Europe rely on a well-developed network of VET stakeholders. In some countries these are formal networks involving social partners, but it is quite different depending on the country specific regulation.

2.2. Typologies of VET

Before going deeper into the different typologies of VET, it is important to understand that VET is not only related to learning activities carried out within educational entities, but it has a wider meaning. Hereafter, we try to shortly clarify the differences among formal, informal and non-formal training:

- **Formal training** refers to VET that is carried out through intentional and recognized training activities.
- **Informal training** results from the daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. It is not structured and usually does not lead to certification. In most cases, informal learning is unintentional on the part of the learner.
- **Non-formal training** takes place both through intentional and recognized training activities and through activities carried out on a daily basis in the workplace.

2.2.1 Initial vocational education and training (I-VET)

Initial vocational education and training (I-VET) is usually carried out at secondary level . Traditionally the focus was on training for jobs for short- and medium-term labour market needs; but more and more the goal is to develop broader occupational and professional competences in order to enable the entry into occupations and professions.

It takes place either in a school-based environment (mainly in the classroom) or in a work-based setting, such as training centres and companies. In the countries of the Mediterranean area, the first method of training (school-based) is prevalent, while in many Central and Nord European countries training performed in the workplace is prevalent, although alternating with training performed in training centres.

On average, 50% of young Europeans aged 15-19 participate in I-VET at secondary level. However, this EU average masks significant geographical differences in participation ranging from 15% to more than 70%.

Initial VET is carried out through intentional and recognized training activities, therefore it is called **formal training**. Learning occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution). It is an intentional process from the learner's point of view and leads to validation and certification.



2.2.2 Continuous training (C-VET)

Continuous training (C-VET) takes place after initial vocational education and training or after beginning working life. It aims to upgrade knowledge, to help citizens to acquire new skills and to retrain and develop further personal and professional development. It is mostly work-based but it may be carried out also in class-room activities. Learning takes place both through intentional and recognized training activities and through activities carried out on a daily basis in the workplace (**non-formal training**). Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification; however, non-formal learning is intentional on the part of the learner and has structured objectives, learning time and learner support.

2.2.3 Toward lifelong learning

Traditionally, learning was concentrated in the first part of life, and there was a clear separation from the subsequent phase of entry into active life. Now the boundaries of learning tend to become less and less clear-cut and the principle of lifelong learning has developed. Learning takes place throughout life in different contexts, both in formal educational activities and outside the traditional educational context, for example in the workplace, but also in everyday life experience (the latter is called by the European Union **informal training**). Informal learning results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure, it is not structured and most often does not lead to certification. In most cases, informal learning is unintentional on the part of the learner.

This scenario broadens our understanding and conception of what is meant by VET. The emphasis is on vocational and labour-market-oriented learning at all levels and in all institutional settings. Vocational learning will not be restricted to the institutions explicitly defined as VET providers today, but it will form part of an integrated lifelong and life-wide learning approach. In order to enhance the quality of skills, knowledge and competencies of European workers and employs, Lifelong Learning should be greatly supported by our society by all the stakeholders involved, both public and private, as it represents an important opportunity for both workers and the overall EU social and economic system.. LLL is not only considered as learning for employment, but also for personal, civic and social purposes, together with employability, adaptability and active citizenship.

To promote participation in lifelong learning, the European Union is proposing concrete actions at all levels, including a new way of assessing and recognizing the skills acquired, to allow all citizens to move freely between different studies, work, geographical contexts, enhancing the knowledge and skills.

2.3. Examples of VET dual systems across the EU

The following chapters present how dual systems are organised and which benefits they bring to the students and the labour markets. We present the case studies of some partner countries of the ALLVIEW alliance that represent their achievements and can foster policy makers and VET regulatory entities across Europe to adopt similar practices.

2.3.1 VET dual learning system in Italy

VET in Italy is a responsibility of the regional governments, although laws and funding from the Italian State and the European Community Union contribute to its implementation at different levels. The systems are not the same in all Italian regions, moreover all of them are implemented in different ways. But the following are the common pathways in the Italian VET system:

- *Istituti professionali* (IPS-vocational institutes): they are managed by the Ministry of education, are 5 year long (usually for pupils from 14 to 18-19 years-level EQF 4) and lead, after passing a final national examination, to the possession of a diploma which can give access to all the University courses (after passing a preselection examination for certain courses).
- *Istruzione e Formazione professionale* (leFP-Vocational and educational training): it is managed by the Regional governments, but it must follow some basic national rules; it is 3 years long (usually from 14 to 17 years) and leads to a vocational qualification (level EQF 3); after gaining the qualification, pupils can continue one more year and get a vocational diploma (EQF 4). This vocational diploma can give access to one further specialization year (IFTS), after which it is possible to access to *Istituti tecnici superiori* (ITS Academy-usually 2 years long-EQF 5).

The *Istituti professionali* are more theoretical and school based, while leFP is more aimed at a training linked to the world of work, therefore a certain period of on-the-job training inside a company is provided.

Some leFP courses provide a longer stay in the company (dual learning system-not less than 400 hours stay during the third and fourth year). Pupils can also attend leFP having an apprenticeship contract; in this case the school-based training must provide a maximum of 594 hours per year during the 1st or 2nd year and a maximum of 495 hours per year during the 3rd or 4th year; the remaining hours are carried out in the company.

The aim of VET courses provided by leFP is providing pupils with skills useful for entering the labour market and as such it includes also general knowledge subjects along the four years. The subsequent studies (IFTS- ITS) concern only technical-professional topics and foreign languages. The professional training offered through VET are diverse and range from industrial and artisanal manufacturing occupations, to tourism, personal care and well-being, business services, etc.

The various professional figures refer to the regional framework of professional profiles (QRSP) which in turn refers to the National Directory of education and training qualifications and professional qualifications.

The growing shortage of operators and specialized technicians in all productive and tertiary sectors of the Italian economy has along the years considerably increased the attention for VET by all stakeholders involved.

The experience of the last 20 years has shown that VET is successful when these three elements are present:

- consistency between the training needs of an economic sector and the training offer;
- presence of a coherent training offer in the geographical area where the needs of economic operators arise;
- high qualitative level of the training offer, which is expressed with the use of qualified teachers, mostly from the reference professional field and by making cutting-edge technological equipment available to students.

In those cases where these three conditions are implemented, educational and employment success often exceed 90%, thus making a clear contribution to the local and national social and economic development.



2.3.2 VET dual learning system in Germany

Dual training, which has been established in Germany for a long time (since 1969), takes place according to the principles of the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) in a training company, in a vocational school and other vocational training institutions, and is characterized by learning processes across learning locations (dual learning). The company (mainly small and medium-sized enterprises) provides the practical part of training during three or four days per week, while vocational schools provide the theoretical part on one or two days per week. The training is based on the training framework plan of the respective training regulations. As a rule, VET lasts between two and three years and half, with an intermediate and a final examination to be passed. In the skilled jobs, the final examination is traditionally called the journeyman's examination (geselle prufung). A final exam, which is performed by the chambers, completes the apprenticeship. Upon passing the final examination, apprentices receive a chamber certificate (or a journeyman certificate in the case of a craft trades occupation) to document that training has been successfully completed. The written part of the examinations is generally standardized throughout Germany. This ensures that the examinations are objective and that the respective examination results are comparable throughout Germany. The unified national standard and a state-recognized qualification act as a seal of quality that employers can use as a label to recruit new employees.

In order to meet the constantly changing requirements, the training regulations are regularly modernized and adapted to technical progress, changing professional practice and economic, legal and social changes, not least due to the digital and ecological transformation.

The aim of dual vocational training is to qualify future skilled workers for independent work in a wide type of fields. To achieve this, not only industry-specific subjects are taught, but important cross-occupational topics are also included in the mandatory program of all training regulations as so-called standard vocational training items. These are minimum standards that are taught in all occupations throughout the entire training period together with the occupation-specific technical knowledge, both in the company and at vocational school. There is a particular focus on the important topics of environmental protection, sustainability and digitization.

In total, apprentices in Germany have the choice between more than 320 different apprenticeship occupations, with 425.000 companies in Germany providing their own training. In 2020, 132.200 new training contracts were concluded in Germany, with a takeover rate of 77 percent after training. The costs of VET are jointly covered by companies, learners and the state.

The advantages of dual training are the guarantee of practical relevance of education in the company. The trainees are familiarized with the latest technical developments and can recommend themselves in the companies, which positively influences a takeover after the training. The learning phase is also shortened by the experience gained as an apprentice. After completing their training, the apprentices are able to carry out their work independently as autonomous skilled workers. The companies also benefit from this and have a better chance to engage skilled workers. In addition, the training allowance allows trainees to focus on their training.

However, there are also a few disadvantages. For example, an increased need for coordination of training regulations leads to delays in their further development. Furthermore, not all aspects of the training can be covered, due to increased specialization of the company. This has to be mitigated with the help of inter-company training or through partnerships with other companies at organizational and financial levels.



In Germany, there is also the offer of dual studies. A dual course is a course at a university or at a university of cooperative education integrating vocational training or practical phases in a company. It differs from traditional VET courses in the fact that it is more practice-oriented and it is also characterized by two learning locations, the university and the company. Vocational practice and studies are closely interlinked in terms of organization and curriculum.

The dual study program is becoming increasingly popular. According to 2022 data, a total of 1,749 dual courses of study were available, in which 120,517 students were enrolled, and the trend was rising. Accordingly, more and more companies are offering training positions for dual studies. At the time of this guide preparation, around 56,852 cooperating companies or locations are involved in the dual study program. Most offers of dual study programs can be found in engineering (and other dual study programs in the skilled trades) with 805 offers (46,0%), law, economics and social sciences with 783 dual study programs (44,8%) and health sciences with 121 (6,9%).

For additional info:

<https://www.bibb.de/de/48.php>

<https://www.bibb.de/de/698.php>

<https://www.bibb.de/en/77203.php>

<https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Dossier/ausbildung-und-beruf.html>

https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/C-D/duales-berufsausbildungssystem-in-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/en/education/the-german-vocational-training-system/the-german-vocational-training-system_node.html

<https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/de/studium-ausbildung/ausbildung-in-deutschland/was-ist-das/dual>

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duale_Ausbildung

<https://www.bibb.de/de/702.php>

https://www.bibb.de/de/pressemitteilung_174895.php

2.3.3 VET dual learning system in The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there are two main types of vocational education and training (VET) programmes that combine work at companies and learning at school: Beroeps Begeleidende Leerweg (work-based training) and Beroeps Opleidende Leerweg (school-based training). Both programmes offer students the opportunity to gain practical experience within companies while studying for a vocational qualification.

Beroeps Begeleidende Leerweg (work-based learning path)

- Students have an employment contract with an employer and work there for a specified number of hours per week
- They receive a salary from their employer for the work they do.
- Students attend school for theoretical classes, typically one day per week, where they learn the necessary knowledge and skills related to their chosen field.
- Work-based learning paths are available at different levels (EQF 2, 3, and 4) and in various sectors, allowing students to specialize in their desired area.
- The employer plays a vital role in providing guidance, support, and creating a conducive learning environment for the student's development

- The programmes are well-suited for individuals who prefer a hands-on learning approach and want to start working and earning a salary while studying.

Beroeps Opleidende Leerweg (school-based learning path)

- Students attend school on a full-time basis and participate in practical training during their internships at various companies.
- During school, students attend theoretical classroom-based training as well as practical workshops
- The duration of internships varies according to the number of years of education and EQF level.
- Students do not have an employment contract with an employer nor they receive a salary during their internships.
- School-based programmes are available at different EQF levels (1 to 4) and cover a wide range of fields and specializations.
- School-based programmes are suitable for individuals who prefer a more traditional classroom-based learning environment and do not need or want to work while studying.

Dual learning at Hout- en Meubileringscollege (HMC)



HMC offers both work-based and school-based learning paths in the education that prepare students for careers in the wood and furniture industry.

The combination of work at companies and learning at school (dual learning) allows students to develop the practical skills, knowledge, and professional competencies necessary to excel in their chosen field.

Work-based learning

Students can either directly arrange their contract with a company or use the services of SWV (a partnership of several companies with regional coordination and central administration).

SWV



Employers benefit from the SWV partnership because the regional and central organisation looks after the contract and salary payments for the student. The two years contract allows companies to temporarily take on students during busy periods. Students benefit from this as they can be deployed at multiple companies, so they have the opportunity to explore multiple types of companies and learn multiple types of skills. In addition, SWV provides mediation, re-placement in case of mismatch and extra skills training and workshops for students when needed.

School based training

At HMC, school-based training programmes are enriched with a large number of internships at companies of 9 to 10 weeks each, varying in number depending on the number of years of the education

Level	no. of years	no. of internships
EQF 2	2	3
EQF 3	3	4
EQF 4	4	6
EQF 4	3	4



SBB

All companies have to meet some basic criteria to be able to employ students or take them in as interns. SBB is the cooperative organisation that accredits companies, safeguarding the alignment with the education, quality and safety.

HMC focuses on delivering high-quality vocational education and training. Students undergo practical exams at school to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Additionally, they complete practical exams at the training company, often involving the production of specific items. The successful completion of these exams, along with a portfolio interview, leads to a diploma.

2.3.4 VET dual learning system in Slovenia

After the apprenticeship path was abolished in 2006, due to low interest from employers, the new Apprenticeship Act was adopted in 2017.

Since then, apprenticeship programmes are part of the system of secondary vocational education (3-year programmes, EQF 4). Most of the apprenticeship programmes are carried out within companies (50% to 60%) and the rest, being mostly general and theoretical education, at school. The relevant Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia accredits practical training placements in companies. The apprenticeship contract is signed by the employer and apprentice and must be verified by the relevant chamber. The school and the company prepare an apprenticeship implementation plan for each apprentice, under the relevant chamber's supervision. The apprenticeship implementation plan defines the objectives (including learning outcomes) and time schedule of the practical training, the distribution of roles and means of communication and cooperation between the school and the company, also regarding the final exams. It is signed by the learner and the representatives of the school, company and chamber. The company covers basic safety and health insurance, subsidies/costs for food and travel and pays a remuneration to apprentices.

To obtain an official recognition/certificate of the apprenticeship programme, the trainee should pass a final exam, including a written and oral part in her/his mother tongue and a final practical assignment. A national examination catalogue is developed by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET (CPI) and approved by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for VET for each programme.

Every school year, approximately 20 schools and school centres offer selected apprenticeship programmes for different occupations, such as electrician, mason, roofer, industrial mechanic, joiner, metal shaper – toolmaker, machine engineering mechanic, bricklayer, car mechanic, etc...

For additional info:

<https://www.gzs.si/vajenistvo>

<https://cpi.si/poklicno-izobrazevanje/vajenistvo/>

2.3.5 VET dual learning system in Flanders (Belgium)

After a series of pilot projects on dual learning, the Flemish government adopted a decree for the structural implementation of dual learning. On 1 September 2019, dual learning was definitively introduced in secondary education. Dual learning offers students a training course in which they acquire skills on the workplace and in a school, centre for part-time education or Syntra-course. The learning



process therefore consists of a lesson and work component that are geared to one another and together form a coherent whole.

For the system to be successful, the cooperation of enterprises, sectors, training providers, educational organisations with regard to dual learning is crucial. This requires clarity on what dual learning entails in practice.

In dual learning, a learner learns alternately in a company and at school. It is a fully-fledged learning pathway within secondary and adult education. In dual learning, the learner spends a lot of time on the work floor. A good match between learner and workplace is therefore essential.

A dual course can be organised at earliest in the 5th year of secondary school. Most programs focus on the 7th year of secondary school. This dual learning program consists of max. two days of lessons per week at school and three or four days in a company.

The schools can choose themselves if they want to offer dual courses and for which classes, there is no obligation.

For a better understanding:

- Students in the 5th year of secondary school are 16-17 years old
- Students in the 7th year are normally 18-19 years old.

If a company wants to train a dual student or course participant in their workplace, then they need to be accredited to do so. After all, in a dual learning programme, a learner acquires a large part of the competences in the workplace. A high-quality learning workplace is therefore very important for successful completion of the training.

To be recognised, the company must meet a number of recognition requirements. They must also appoint at least one mentor, who will be responsible for training and guiding the trainee on the work floor.

This mentor must also meet a number of conditions, including taking a mentor training course. As a company, one can apply for recognition for each course for which they want to conclude an agreement.

The recognition procedure starts by submitting an application in the digital office "app.werkplekduaal.be".

The application must be processed within 14 days.

Responsibilities and competences

- The educational institution

Managing board of the educational institution

The management represents the educational institution. As a training provider, it makes it possible to plan a dual learning path together with the company. It ensures that the offer of the dual learning path is aligned with the validated target framework.

Dual learning coordinator

The dual learning coordinator is responsible for the practical organization of the course of study. He plans, organizes and monitors the global implementation of the dual learning path for all students. He is the point of contact for the management, the company, the program counsellor and the teacher. He coordinates the administrative preparations and concludes an "training agreement for dual learning" together with the management.

Pathway counsellor

The dual learning pathway counsellor plans the individual dual learning path of the students, organizes it and monitors its implementation. He guides the student and is the point of contact for teachers, supervisors and mentors. Together with the mentor of the company, he coaches the student in the learning process



and evaluates the learning progress, based on the validated target framework and predetermined evaluation criteria. The pathway counsellor also provides feedback to both the student and the mentor.

Teacher

The teacher fills in the various learning contents of the school component. He guides the students in terms of content by offering adapted study packages (one or two days per week)

Student

The student attends classes on a regular basis, both at school and on the work floor. He carefully fills in a logbook and provides feedback on the acquired competences in the workplace via a portfolio.

- Company

Company management

The management of the company represents the company. As an employer, they make it possible to organize a dual learning path, together with the educational institution.

Mentor

The mentor of the company is an employee who has received specific training as a coach in the corresponding sector. He is the person who guides the student within the company. He is the contact person between the company and the pathway counsellor. The mentor evaluates the student, together with the pathway counsellor and determines to what extent the student has mastered the various competences. He also gives feedback to the student to adjust the learning process.

- Dedicated sector organisation

The sector determines the learning pathways and learning outcomes for each (sectorial) dual learning path, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Work and the Ministry of Education. In 2022-2023 there were 19 different dual learning pathways possible within the wood and furniture sector.

The recognition of the companies is issued by the dedicated sector organisation. For the wood and furniture professions in Belgium, this is done by WOODWIZE. Therefore, the sector provides support for the recognition of companies. They also provide support in the form of the organisation and financing of the (compulsory) mentor trainings.

Furthermore, they monitor all dual learners in the sector. Minimum two visits per (school)year and within the company are organised for this follow-up.

The sector also promotes Dual Learning, as well towards companies that can be possible learning/workplaces, as towards youngsters themselves and their parents, through large spread media campaigns.

<https://woodwize.be/nl/page-wide.asp?pageID=270>

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3

Quality Assurance in VET

3. Quality Assurance in VET: concepts and aims of EQAVET

In 2009 the European Parliament and the Council adopted the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Education and Training \(EQAVET\)](#)*. This is a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor the continuous improvement of their VET systems. The *Recommendation* is constructed on a quality model which aims — among other things — to develop a systematic approach of monitoring the performance of VET systems and VET provision at national level (on a voluntary basis) and at European level.

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework can be used in national quality assurance systems, both for initial vocational education and training and for continuous vocational education and training; this framework covers VET in all learning environments (such as school-based provision and work-based learning, including apprenticeship programmes) and all types of learning (digital, face-to-face or mixed), supplied by both public and private suppliers.

The framework should be applied to the VET-system, VET-provider, and qualification-awarding levels. It provides a systemic approach to quality, covering and interrelating the relevant levels and actors. The framework gives strong emphasis to monitoring and improving quality by combining internal and external evaluation, review and processes for improvement, supported by measurement and qualitative analysis. The framework should be a basis for further development through cooperation at European, national, regional and local levels¹.

The quality model is based on common European references which comprise:

- a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision of VET supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors
- and a set of ten indicators, applied at system and provider level.

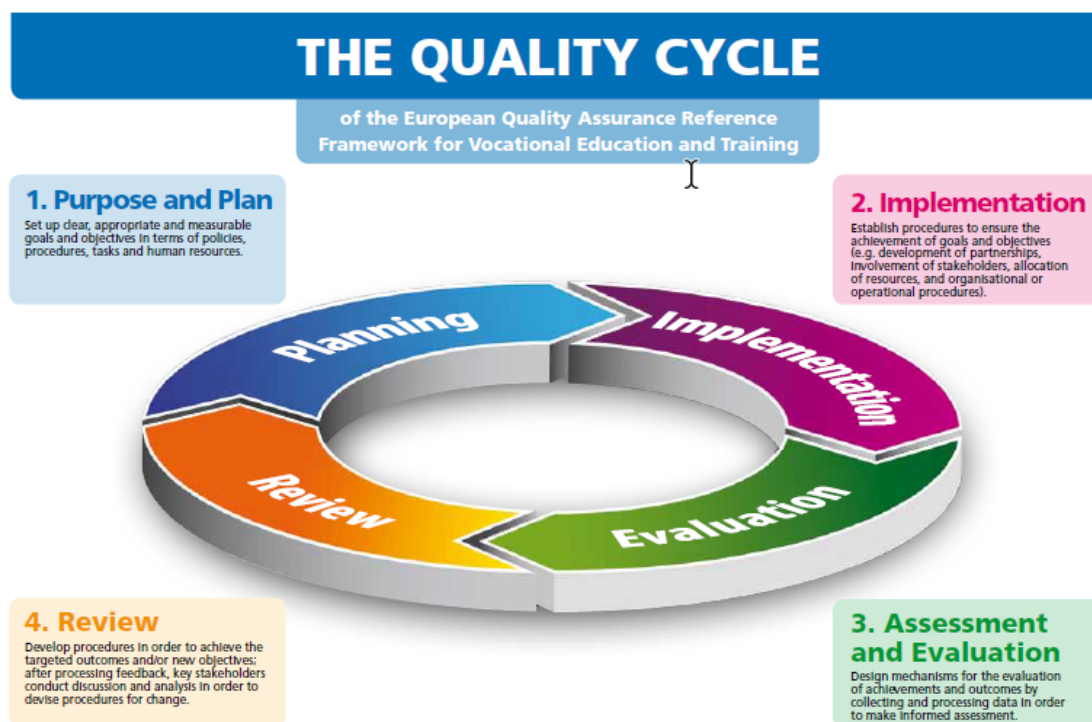
3.1. The quality cycle

The quality cycle is made of four phases: planning, implementation, evaluation and review.

- The first phase (*planning*) consists in the establishment of clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in term of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources. In this phase the involvement of stakeholders is crucial.
- The second phase (*implementation*) consists in the execution of the planned actions to ensure the achievement of the objectives. It is necessary that the rules and procedural steps are clear to all stakeholders.
- The third phase (*evaluation*) provides a combination of mechanisms of internal and external evaluation. The effectiveness of the assessment depends on the definition of a clear methodology and by the coherence between the predetermined objectives and indicators and data collected.
- In the fourth phase (*review*) the data collected through the assessment are used to provide the necessary feedback and the implementation of appropriate changes. In fact, the improvement is a continuous and systematic process.

¹ EQAVET Recommendation, 2009, p. 2

Figure 1: The quality assurance and improvement cycle



3.2. How to implement the Recommendation and the Quality cycle

The four phases of the model are described by the Recommendation through a list of criteria and quality descriptors, which exemplify the actions to be performed for each phase. This is very useful information, because it gives more substance to the model that otherwise might be perceived as mainly theoretical; the use of the criteria and the quality descriptor will guide a correct implementation of each phase.

Table 1: Quality criteria and indicative descriptors for quality cycle at VET provider level

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level for each phase
<p>Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stake-holders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators</p>	<p>European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers.</p> <p>Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored.</p> <p>Ongoing consultation with relevant stake- holders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs.</p> <p>Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated</p> <p>There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development.</p> <p>Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers</p> <p>The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs.</p> <p>VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place.</p>
<p>Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles</p>	<p>Resources are appropriately internally aligned/ assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans.</p> <p>Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned.</p> <p>The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers.</p> <p>Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stake- holders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance.</p>
<p>Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement</p>	<p>Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers.</p> <p>Evaluation and review cover processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction.</p> <p>Evaluation and review include adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders.</p> <p>Early warning systems are implemented.</p>
<p>Review</p>	<p>Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers' feedback this is used to inform further actions.</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available.</p> <p>Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation.</p> <p>Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place.</p>

(Recommendations, 2009, p. 6-7)



Following these quality criteria and indicative descriptors, the framework supports VET providers in establishing a qualitative culture and assure a qualitative process of quality assurance and development.

3.3 Practical tips

Each VET system or provider can start the quality assurance process at any one of the stages e.g.

- when looking at the quality assurance of a new VET procedure (e.g. the design of new qualifications), it might be better to begin with the planning stage
- when adapting an existing VET procedure (e.g. the transfer of centre-based learning to on-line or blended provision) it might be better to begin by implementing the existing quality assurance processes and then evaluating its effectiveness
- for well-established VET processes, evaluating the effectiveness of the current arrangements is often the first stage of the quality assurance cycle
- when considering new policies or approaches to VET (e.g., increasing the amount of time that learners are based in a working environment) the review of the existing arrangements is often considered to be the first stage of the quality assurance process.

Most VET providers will begin the Quality cycle starting from the evaluation phase. They need to assess whether the courses meet the objectives set, or what are the strengths and weaknesses of the activities. They can begin performing an internal evaluation, after which it is advisable to undergo an external judgment. The instruments to conduct such an evaluation can be many: indicators (see par. 3.4), satisfaction questionnaires (administered to pupils, teachers, tutors, parents, other stakeholders like employers, etc.), classroom observation, direct interviews, focus groups, etc.

After the analysis and the discussion of the outcomes of the evaluation (which should involve different actors) the Review phase will begin, where the VET provider will focus on new action plans to capitalize on strengths and eliminate weaknesses.

In the planning phase the VET provider will define the goals and objectives to be pursued. It is important in this phase to involve the stakeholders and to set the objectives in line with national and local priorities. The objectives should be defined in operational terms: therefore, instead saying "we want reduce drop-out rate" it's better to say "we want to reduce the drop-out rate by 10%". This way of setting objectives will make it easier to evaluate the project results.



3.3.1 Practical example from the sector

The following example aims to provide interested professionals a practical summary of success factors and pitfalls for enhancing the quality of a VET offer and move towards the ambitious aim of providing across the EU excellent VET within the wood and furniture sector. As we previously explained, the EQAVET principles do not represent a compulsory scheme of reference for EU operators, but they represent a scheme aiming to support them to enhance the quality of the VET systems and provision across the EU. The idea of this scheme is in line with the EQAVET framework and aims to provide specific inputs coming from past experiences of different actors within the EU wood and furniture sector.

The following table summarizes in different lists some key factors and pitfalls to be taken into consideration for securing the quality of education and training and guaranteeing that the training provision has an acceptable (and possibly excellent) quality level. This table is one of the key outputs of a sectoral project implemented between 2018 and 2020: Bolster-up 2 project <https://bolster-up2.eu/>.

These key factors do not appear by chance but are the consequence of a well-designed, implemented and monitored activity, applying the descriptors of the EQAVET quality cycle: e.g.: *an appropriate training path*, or plan, is a consequence of the implementation of descriptors presented in the planning and implementation phases of the EQAVET Cycle (phases 1 and 2); *perspective of a secure job* is a consequence of a good analysis of local needs (phase 1 of EQAVET cycle); *up-to-date teachers* are the consequence of a plan for staff competence development which specifies the needs for training for teachers and trainers (phase 2 of the EQAVET quality cycle); *qualifications degrees easily obtained* should be monitored through a continuous monitoring process (phase 3 of the EQAVET quality cycle).

Pitfalls may happen when the training activity is not well planned in coherence with the EQAVET quality descriptors.

Table 2: Success factors and pitfalls (in order to guarantee the quality of education and training).

Source Bolster-up project: <https://bolster-up2.eu/>

EDUCATION	SCHOOL BASED LEARNING	WORK BASED TRAINING	TRAINING CENTRES
Success factors to quality assurance of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate training path (curriculum) • Up-to-date infrastructure, fully equipped classrooms, new technical materials, top hand tools • Up-to-date teachers • Number of students per school • Regional training offers • Perspective of a secure job (homeland as well as in other EU countries) • Real assignments • Implements and promotes dual training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate training plan; to accept students as a part of the curriculum • Sufficient time investment for learning • Appropriate infrastructure/machinery; complete system of working machines • Mentoring, tutoring • Good assignments in the internship • Possibility for international internship • Perspective of a secure job in the company • Students should understand / be involved in the process from receipt of an order up to the delivery (end-to-end) in order to understand customer needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional training offers • Collaboration with suppliers • Up-to-date infrastructure • Up-to-date instructors / teachers • Centre where the unemployment services train unemployed people also available for co-worker training • Updated/advanced training contents • Qualification degrees easily obtained • Fully equipped classrooms
Pitfalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low intensity of use of the infrastructure or machinery by the student • Learning not aligned with the real needs of the sector • Specific for upholsterer: availability of modern scanning / cutting equipment for coating materials (leather, imitation leather, textiles). Cutting and making patterns is done manually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working instead of learning • Students vs co-workers; not enough time for tutoring • Time investments for learning: students reduce productivity during working and learning • Need to be aware that the working machine systems are up to date • Expectation does not match skills (especially at start of education). At start not clear what the learning goals are. • Not enough importance to OHS or waste management issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic pricing • Suppliers with a too strong commercial focus • Number of students per centre can be too low • Risk of incomplete training – does not cover all the real needs • Training contents not technologically updated • Working machine system may not be complete and no view on completing it.

3.4. The Ten EQAVET indicators

The Recommendation proposes also a set of indicators relating to different aspects of the training. The use of indicators is not compulsory, but it is a useful reference point to compare some strategic aspects of the educational process, such as the levels of participation, the educational success, the employment rate, the use of acquired skills, the inclusion for disadvantaged people, etc.

The use of the indicators has many positive aspects. In particular, the following advantages can be listed:

- It allows comparison and benchmarking: the indicator allows to compare different situations, identifying reference points which are set as goals to be achieved.
- It allows an impartial monitoring: the identification of precise reference parameters is able to prevent (or to reduce) the subjectivity of judgment.
- It allows to encourage those who achieve better results and to support those who have difficulties, the transparency ensured by the indicators allow to identify the areas of excellence and the critical areas and to decide which are the most suitable policies to implement.
- It provides a solid starting point for the assessment. Without a quantitative base, any assessment activity is at risk of subjectivity. It should indeed be reminded that the assessment does not end with the quantitative analysis, since it must always be completed with a qualitative analysis.

The EQAVET set of ten indicators is a selection from the total possible range of VET relevant indicators and is based on the underlying theoretical and political understanding of what processes and outcomes are important. Specifically, this set of indicators (see list of EQAVET indicators below) provides a way of focusing on a significant number of aspects of the VET provision.

Table 3: List of EQAVET indicators

Indicator	How it is calculated	Comments	Purpose
1) <i>Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:</i>	(a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative; (b) share of accredited VET providers.	This indicator should be used at system level	Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level Increase the transparency of quality of training Improve mutual trust on training provision
2) <i>Investment in training of teachers and trainers:</i>	(a) Share of teachers and trainers participating in further training; (b) amount of funds invested, including for digital skills		Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET. Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market. Increase individual learning capacity building. Improve learners' achievement

<p>3) Participation rate in VET programmes</p>	<p>Number of participants in VET programmes (1), according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (2):</p>	<p>(1) For IVET: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant. For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes. (2) Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrants, persons with disabilities, length of unemployment</p>	<p>Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET.</p> <p>Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups</p>
<p>4) Completion rate in VET programmes</p>	<p>Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p>		<p>Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes.</p> <p>Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate.</p> <p>Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET.</p> <p>Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups</p>
<p>5) Placement rate in VET programmes:</p>	<p>(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 (3); (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;</p>	<p>(3)For IVET: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant. For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.</p>	<p>Support employability.</p> <p>Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market.</p> <p>Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups</p>

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) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.		Increase employability. Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
7) Unemployment rate	Unemployment rate (4) according to individual criteria	(4) Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level
8) Prevalence of vulnerable groups:	(a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender; (b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender.		Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level. Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups. Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups
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 their effectiveness	This indicator should be used at system level	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. Support employability
10) Schemes used to promote better access to VET:	(a) information on existing schemes at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	This indicator should be used at system level	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups. Provide guidance to (potential) VET learners. Support adapted training provision

3.5 How to use the indicators

The indicators can be used for different purposes:

- They can be used to set the objectives of the activity: e.g. “90% of our trainees will find a coherent job within 10 months after the end of the course”;
- They can be used to examine the historical evolution of the activity: e.g. this year 90% of our trainees found a coherent job against 85% in the previous year.
- They can be used to compare the outcomes of the activity at geographical level: e.g. 90% of our trainees found a coherent job against 80% of trainees at national level;

The comparison between different contexts can provide a point of reference and a criterion for attributing a value to the data being examined; for example, if it occurs that 80% of the students finds a job at the end of the course, it could be concluded that our course has been successful. But, if it happens that in the same area and in the same sector 90% of the students trained in other courses have found a consistent employment, then the judgment on our course becomes less positive.

When making comparisons, one should be very careful: the context to be evaluated should be similar in order to make a correct comparison; unfortunately, it’s very frequent to find comparisons managed between different settings and different contexts (e.g. when the comparison is managed between very different geographical areas). For this reason, when evaluating the outcomes of a certain activity, it is very important to look not only at the final results of the activity, but also to the context (e.g. who were the trainees? Did they come from the same sociocultural or disadvantaged context?) and to the process (what type of activity has been set up?).

However, it is necessary to clarify that indicators are not synonymous with evaluation; indicators are an important evaluation tool, just as they can be an instrument of any cognitive, analytical or decision-making process. The evaluation activity must use the indicators as it uses other types of analysis, which cannot be reduced to the indicators. In fact, the indicators, however numerous and exhaustive they may be, are unlikely to be able to account for the complexity of the phenomena involved. Therefore, while it is absolutely necessary to refer to quantitative information that (possibly) allows a comparison with other similar realities, it is equally necessary to integrate other types of analysis, based on more qualitative analysis and on direct observation of the phenomenon. Even direct observation, however, should be structured or, at least, guided to be able to trace it back to common schemes and to be able to compare it with other observations.

3.6. The 2020 Recommendation on vocational education and training

According to the European Commission, during the ten years of its implementation, “EQAVET has stimulated reforms in national quality assurance systems, but did not contribute significantly to the improvement of transparency of quality assurance arrangements. Furthermore, it was mostly applied in school-based initial vocational education and training”. Therefore, the European Commission drafted a new Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, which was approved by the European Council on 24 November 2020².

² COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01)



The 2020 Recommendation integrates the existing EQAVET tools into a new framework, adding elements to address the shortcomings of its implementation in relation to the quality of learning outcomes, certification and assessment, stakeholders' consultation, the role of teachers and trainers, work-based learning and flexibility of vocational education and training.

In order to improve mutual learning, enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements in the provision of vocational education and training and reinforce mutual trust between EU Member States, EU level peer reviews of quality assurance at system level have been introduced.

The implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation is supported by National Quality Assurance Reference Points (NRPs), that bring together relevant stakeholders at the national and regional level to:

- implement and further develop the EQAVET framework
- inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to the implementation of the EQAVET framework
- support self-evaluation as one way to measure success and identify areas for improvement, including the digital readiness of VET systems and institutions
- participate actively in the EQAVET network
- provide updated descriptions of the national quality assurance arrangements based on EQAVET
- engage in EU level peer review to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between Member States.

3.7. Quality assurance in VET on system level: the phase of planning (a practical example: Slovenia)

All VET qualifications on national level are based on occupational profiles. Occupational profiles represents occupations that already exist or are emerging in the labour market. The main advantage of the occupational profile is its ability to respond rapidly to the requirements of the labour market and of modern ways of organising work in enterprises and small businesses or service activities.

The procedure consist of different stages where social partners and all other relevant stakeholders participate in setting occupational profiles. They are involved in drawing up the content of the occupational profiles and deciding on their appropriateness.. The important role on decision level is given to the Sectoral committees, which consists of representatives from companies, ministries and trade unions in the sector. There are 10 different Sectoral Committees appointed by Ministry of Labour.

The process of drafting an occupational profile begins with a proposal submitted to National Institute for VET.(¹) which is responsible for developing VET qualifications on national level and it is the main coordinator of social partners in the process of designing occupational profiles and educational programmes. The proposal for new occupational profile can be submitted by a company or more companies, trade union, professional associations etc. from certain sector. Proposal of occupational profile must include the following information: key tasks that are typical for the proposed new occupation, an analysis of needs in terms of the long-term development of the sector, information on existing possibilities to gain a vocational qualification, information on international comparability with qualification in EU countries.

When the proposal contains all necessary information and is well established it is approved by a sectoral committee. In the next stage sectoral committee s appoints a national working group, that consists of experts from the sector to design . the occupational profile, with methodological support from the NIVET³. The experts defines the necessary knowledge, skills and vocational competences..

When occupational profile is finalised, the NIVET presents it to the sectoral committee. When it is approved, it is submitted to the Expert Council for Vocational Education and Training that is appointed at the Ministry of Education. The Expert Council issues a decision on the adoption and publication of occupational profile. In the final stage, the minister at the Ministry for labour, signs a decision on adoption and official publication of the occupational profile. In the final stage, curricula experts design a new educational programme based on skills, knowledge and vocational competences that are included in occupational profile. In this stage, key competences are added as well. Therefore, educational programme consists of vocational competences, key competences (key competences such as communication, ICT, sustainability, quality assurance etc.) and general ones (Slovene language, maths, geography, history, etc.). VET programmes are competence-based and modularised. The completion of a specific number of modules leads to a vocational qualification.

³ National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (NIVET – CPI)



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4

**Other EU VET policy instruments to
promote flexibility, transparency and
learning recognition across EU
countries**

4. Other EU VET policy instruments to promote flexibility, transparency and learning recognition across EU countries

4.1. European Qualification Framework (EQF)

In 2008 the European Union approved a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the establishment of a European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (European Qualification Framework - EQF). The purpose of the EQF is to provide a common language for describing qualifications and to help Member States, employers and individuals to compare qualifications from different education and training systems in the EU, by establishing a single framework of reference. The EQF shifts the focus of certification from the characteristics of the training activities (length, content, etc.) to the learning outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and competences⁴.

The use of learning outcomes makes it clear what a person knows, understands and is able to do. It does not matter how the competence was acquired (length of learning experience, type of institution). This approach facilitates not only the transfer and use of qualifications from different countries and education and training systems, but also the validation of non-formal and informal training.

The European Framework includes all educational qualifications, from basic to undergraduate and postgraduate. It is divided into eight reference levels, which describe the knowledge and the skills (learning outcomes) that characterize it, as well as the level of responsibility and autonomy. This makes it possible to classify the level of knowledge, skills and competences regardless of how it was acquired. The EQF is closely linked to national qualifications frameworks, this way it can provide a comprehensive map of all types and levels of qualifications in Europe, which are increasingly accessible through qualification databases.

Therefore, all Member States must indicate the correspondence of titles and qualifications issued at national level with the eight levels established at European level, ranging from level 1 to level 8. This framework helps improve transparency, comparability and portability of people's qualifications and makes it possible to compare qualifications from different countries and institutions.

Level 1 is characterized by the possession of:

- basic knowledge,
- basic skills needed to perform simple tasks,
- work or study, under direct supervision, in a structured context.

Level 8 is characterized by the possession of:

- state-of-the-art knowledge in a field of work or study and at the interface between different sectors,

⁴ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01)



- more advanced and specialized skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation skills necessary to solve complex research and/or innovation problems and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practices,
- possession of authority, capacity for innovation, autonomy, integrity typical of the scholar and professional and continuous commitment to the development of new ideas or cutting-edge processes in work, study and research contexts.

Simplifying, it can be said that level 8 corresponds to the level of knowledge and skills typically owned by a person holding the Ph. D. level; continuing with the exemplification, it can be said that level 3 applies to the level of knowledge and skills typically owned by those who have a professional qualification; level 4 applies to the knowledge and skills normally owned by those who hold an upper secondary school diploma; level 5 applies to knowledge and skills typically owned by those who hold a post-secondary (but not university) diploma; finally, levels 6, 7 and 8 applies to knowledge and skills typically owned by people holding diplomas at tertiary level. However, it is repeated that what is presented here is only one possible exemplification, because the EQF classifies the levels of knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility acquired regardless of the paths followed; in fact, the emphasis of the Recommendation is placed on the results achieved and not on the paths followed: it is entirely possible to be classified at EQF level 8, even without having followed formal university studies. As can be understood, the EQF recommendation paves the way for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired beyond the possession of formal educational qualifications.

The EQF was set up in 2008 and later revised in 2017. Its revision has kept the core objectives of creating transparency and mutual trust in the landscape of qualifications in Europe⁵. Member States committed themselves to further develop the EQF and make it more effective in facilitating the understanding of national, international and third-country qualifications by employers, workers and learners.

Recommendations regarding Quality assurance of EQF

The Implementation of the European Qualification Framework can only be accomplished through *common principles for quality assurance*, as listed below. These principles integrate those described in the EQAVET Framework:

- quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework,
- quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions,
- quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies,
- external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review,
- quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes,
- quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
 - clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for

⁵ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03)

- implementation, including stakeholder involvement,
 - appropriate resources,
 - consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review,
 - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement,
 - widely accessible evaluation results.
- quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis,
- quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community,
- quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

Table 4: Descriptors defining levels in the EQF

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>

EQF level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	<i>In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.</i>	<i>In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).</i>	<i>In the context of the EQF responsibility and autonomy is described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility.</i>
Level 1 Relevant learning outcomes	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 Relevant learning outcomes	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 Relevant learning outcomes	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 Relevant learning outcomes	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or

Relevant learning outcomes	knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6 Relevant learning outcomes	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 Relevant learning outcomes	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 Relevant learning outcomes	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

4.2. European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

In order to facilitate the capitalization and transfer of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) of an individual moving from one learning context to another and/or from one qualification system to another, and to support recognition of learning outcomes regardless of where they are acquired, the Parliament and the European Council had approved in 2009 a Recommendation on the establishment of a European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)⁶. ECVET concerned the entire Vocational Education and Training system and allowed credits to be awarded, expressed in points, in relation to learning experiences, regardless of whether they were carried out within formal or non-formal paths. The objective of ECVET was to promote the flexibility of training systems through the assessment

⁶ RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02)



and validation of learning outcomes in order to transfer credits from one qualifications system to another, or from one training pathway to another. ECVET is based on the division of qualifications into units and on the description of learning outcomes of each unit. Qualifications and units are represented by a specific number of credit points. Credit points express the volume of learning outcomes in each unit and provide information on the relative weight of the units which make up a qualification.

According to this system, students can accumulate study points/credits over time and be recognized for the learning outcomes, that are required to obtain a certain qualification, and in different countries or in different situations, without attending further education and training courses.

According to the Recommendation of November 2020 already mentioned in the previous chapter⁷ “during the ten years of its implementation, ECVET has widely contributed to the development of a better quality mobility experience through the use and documentation of units of learning outcomes. **The concept of ECVET points however was generally not applied and ECVET did not lead to the development of a European credit system in vocational education and training**”. Therefore, while reconfirming the core principles of ECVET related to flexibility (e.g. the use of units of learning outcomes) and the use of some ECVET tools (e.g. the Learning Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding) the **2020 Recommendation replaced the ECVET Recommendation**, proposing that the mobility of VET learners should be further developed under other EU instruments, such as those supported under the Erasmus+ programme: the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**, the **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)**, the **Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability**, the **Europass tools** and the European classification of skills/competences, qualifications and occupations (**ESCO**).

4.3. ESCO

ESCO is the European multilingual classification of qualifications, competences, skills and occupations and it is part of the Europe 2020 strategy. ESCO works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations and skills relevant for the EU labour market and education and training.

The ESCO classification identifies and ranks the skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant to labour market, education and training systems within the EU. The system provides a complete list of occupational profiles in 25 European languages showing the relationships between their specific occupations, skills, competences and qualifications. ESCO has been developed in an open IT format, and it is available for free of charge use by everyone and can be accessed through an online portal⁸.

ESCO concepts and descriptions can help people to understand:

- What knowledge and skills are usually required when working in a specific occupation;
- What knowledge, skills and competences are obtained as a result of a specific qualification;
- What qualifications are demanded or often requested by employers from those searching for work in a specific occupation.

ESCO's terminology can directly support the systems of validation currently being set up by European countries, in particular the European systems for the accumulation and transfer of credits in higher education (ECTS). The Annual Report 2021⁹ highlights the use of the ESCO system by multiple organizations, public and private, within European countries for several purposes: career learning and development management, job-search and job-matching purposes, statistical research and for multiple purposes in the same time.

⁷ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01)

⁸ <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/>

⁹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION Directorate-General for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion: *European Skills, Competences and Occupations classification Annual Report 2021*



Who can benefit from ESCO and how to use it

ESCO classification can be used by a variety of actors in the VET and labour market system:

- **Jobseekers** can use ESCO to describe their skills, competences and qualifications when developing their CV, which can then go through various automated matching processes; they can also compare their skills, competences and qualifications against job vacancies using ESCO terminology, to identify the skills they are lacking.
- **Employers** can use ESCO to define the set of skills, competences and qualifications their vacancies require when they are developing a job description.
- **Learners**, whether already employed or not, can use it to record their learning outcomes, whether acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning and build personal knowledge, skills and competences profiles.
- **Workers and learners** can use the ESCO Occupational profiles to help identify “skills gaps” against target occupations.
- **Educational and training institutions** can use ESCO for the development and assessment of their curricula.
- Other **organizations developing and/or awarding qualifications** can use ESCO to express the learning outcomes of their qualifications, to reflect emerging skill needs and to facilitate the understanding of their qualifications across borders.
- **Human resources managers** and people offering **career guidance** can use ESCO to enhance planning and make aptitude or ability tests and skills and interest inventories more accurate.
- **Employment services** can use ESCO to exchange relevant labour market information (CVs and vacancies) in a meaningful way.
- **Trade unions and Professional Associations** can use ESCO to help improve job design, the content of qualifications and opportunities for mobility.
- **Software developers** can use the ESCO Occupational profiles to develop new Career Information and Guidance (IAG) tools, such as career pathways
- ESCO will help employers, jobseekers and labour market stakeholders such as **public and private employment services** to access a larger number of CVs or job vacancies²⁰

4.4. European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

The Bologna Process, a reform process at European level which created the European Higher Education Area – EHEA, to which 49 countries adhere, has established as one of its principal goals the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This tool has the objective of describing every qualification in terms of work-load for students, level, learning outcomes, competences and profiles, with the aim of a more correct legibility and comparability of qualifications in the different systems. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery, and evaluation of study programmes and learner mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning²¹.

²⁰ To get more information see ESCO European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations- The first public release-A Europe 2020 initiative

²¹ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system>

ECTS credits express the volume of learning, based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.

Allocation of credits in ECTS allows to assign a number of credits to qualifications, degree programmes or single educational components, such as course units, dissertations, work-based learning and work placements, taking as a basis 60 credits per full-time academic year, according to the estimated workload required to achieve the defined learning outcomes for each component.

The Bologna Process provides that, in all countries, study at the level of higher education should be articulated in three cycles:

- a first cycle with a minimum length of three years – from 180 to 240 ECTS credits,
- a second cycle with a length of one or two years – from 60 to 120 ECTS credits,
- a third cycle of doctorate studies which does not necessarily need to be expressed in the form of credits (the length of doctoral studies in the majority of countries is three years). It is normal that accession to this cycle occurs after the overall accumulation of 300 ECTS credits – around five years of study.

4.5. European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

In 2020 the European Commission has drawn up a framework document, the New *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*, which is a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use²². The European Skills Agenda starts from the Skills Agenda adopted in 2016; it sets objectives to be achieved by 2025 and includes 12 actions²³, five of which will be described below, as we consider them the most relevant for this guide:

- The New Europass
- Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability
- Individual learning accounts (ILA)
- Strengthening skills intelligence
- Skills for life

The European Skills Agenda sets objectives to be achieved by 2025, based on well-established quantitative indicators.

²² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* {SWD(2020) 121 final} - {SWD(2020) 122 final}

²³ The 12 actions can be found at: <https://www.europeansources.info/record/european-skills-agenda-for-sustainable-competitiveness-social-fairness-and-resilience/>

Table 5: European Skills Agenda Indicators

Indicators	Objectives for 2025	Current level (latest year available)	Percentage increase
Participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning during the last 12 month (in %)	50%	38% (2016)	+32%
Participation of low-qualified adults 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months (in %)	30%	18% (2016)	+67%
Share of unemployed adults aged 25-64 with a recent learning experience (in %)	20%	11% (2019)	+82%
Share of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills (in %)	70%	56% (2019)	+25%

Funding

In addition to money from enterprise and governments, the EU is prioritising investing in people and their skills.

Table 6: Funding amounts of EU programmes based on Recovery Plan for Europe proposed by the Commission in May 2020 and referring to the period 2021-2027.

Programme	Investment (in billions of euros)*
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	61.5
Erasmus	16.2
InvestEU	4.9
European Globalisation Adjustment Fund	1.1
European Solidarity Corps	0.8
Digital Europe	0.5

The funding at European level aims at supporting national and international projects that pursue the objectives listed in the actions envisaged by the European Skills Agenda, especially through the Erasmus program, but also within other initiatives.

4.5.1 The New Europass¹⁴

The new Europass offers tools and information for learners, workers and job-seekers across the EU to manage their careers and studies. The new Europass includes:

- the Europass e-Portfolio: an online tool for users to describe their skills, find interesting job and learning opportunities, to manage their applications, and create CVs and cover letters
- Information on working and studying in different EU countries

¹⁴ <https://europa.eu/europass/en>



- Digital credentials: free tools and software for institutions to issue digital, tamper-proof qualifications and other learning credentials <https://europa.eu/europass/en/what-are-digital-credentials>
- Interoperability: Europass can connect with employment and learning services to allow users connect and make applications.

4.5.2 Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability²⁵

On 16 June 2022 the European Council approved a new Recommendation to member States, aiming to develop the **exploration of the concept and use of micro-credentials at European level**. According to the Recommendation “Micro-credential means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been **assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria**”. The splitting of learning into micro-credentials responds to the objective of promoting flexibility in the teaching-learning path, allowing the possibility of accumulating credits and transferring them between different contexts and different activities.

Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are **designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs**. Micro-credentials are **owned by the learner**, can be shared and are portable between and within education and training sectors, in the labour market and across countries. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials; learners should have the possibility, where relevant, to combine different micro-credentials and build logically upon each other. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

Many of the characteristics of the proposal concerning micro-credentials are **reminiscent of** the Recommendation on the Establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) **from 2009**, which has now been rescinded. This particularly applies in respect of the **aim of fostering lifelong learning across borders**, with regard to the credit transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes and in relation to connection with qualifications frameworks and the Europass.

To support the implementation of the micro-credentials, Annex I of the European Recommendation includes a **list of common European standard elements to describe them**, mandatory ones, which are:

- i. Identification of the learner
- ii. Title of the micro-credential
- iii. Country(ies)/region(s) of the issuer
- iv. Awarding body(ies)
- v. Date of issuing
- vi. Learning outcomes
- vii. Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – ECTS, wherever possible)
- viii. Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area), if applicable
- ix. Type of assessment
- x. Form of participation in the learning activity
- xi. Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

²⁵ Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/LSU/?uri=CELEX:32022Ho627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/LSU/?uri=CELEX:32022Ho627(02))



The 10 principles presented in Annex II²⁶ specify the nature of micro-credentials and offer guidance to Member States, public authorities and providers on the design and issuance of micro-credentials and systems for micro-credentials. The 10 principles highlight the key characteristics of the European approach to micro-credentials that can enable the trust and quality of micro-credentials. The principles are universal and may be applied in any area or sector, if appropriate.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the micro-credential system across the EU, the commission, within the framework of the Europass initiative, has launched also a specific website for **European Digital credentials (EDC)** for learning²⁷. "*European Digital Credentials for Learning are electronically sealed digital records given to a person to certify the learning they have undertaken. They can be awarded for formal education, training, online courses, volunteering experiences and more*"²⁸. Any school, college, university or training provider in Europe may use this tool to issue credentials for free and secure them with their e-seal. Credentials can be e-mailed to learners or directly deposited to their Europass profiles. The aim is the provision of an online system for the registration of "recognized" micro-credentials for learning by EU VET providers of any time, from small and local VET providers to well-recognized HEIs. This platform, through a built-in automatic authentication and verification check, supports the micro-credentials creation and recognition and helps to reduce administrative burdens by immediately showing if a credential has been modified or whether it was issued by an unauthorised organisation. If recognized through the platform, these European Digital Credentials for learning have the same legal validity as paper-based credentials and are recognised throughout the European Educational Area.

The website *How to issue European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC)*²⁹ provides detailed information on the concepts behind them and an open online tool for the registration of the micro-credentials by all EU VET providers and HEIs through a well-guided and progressive path.

4.5.3 Individual learning accounts (ILA)²⁰

Also on 16 June 2022 the European Council, to support Member States' initiatives to enable more working-age adults to engage in training in order to increase participation rates and reduce skills gaps, recommended that Member States need to consider **establishing Individual Learning Accounts**, as a possible means to enable individuals to participate in labour-market relevant training.

An 'Individual Learning Account' is a delivery mode for registering individual training entitlements. It is a personal account that allows individuals to accumulate and preserve their entitlements over time, for whichever eligible training, guidance or validation opportunity they deem most useful and whenever they want to, in line with national rules. It grants the individual full ownership of the entitlements, irrespective of the funding. "*Training entitlement*" means the right to access a personal budget at an individual's disposal to cover the direct costs of labour-market-relevant training, guidance and counselling, skills assessment or validation that are eligible for funding.

For more information on micro-credentials and the Individual Learning Account, see also https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_6477

²⁶ Annex II of <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2802%29>

²⁷ European Digital Credentials for learning <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-tools/digital-credentials>

²⁸ European Digital Credentials for learning <https://webgate.acceptance.ec.europa.eu/europass/edci-issuer/#/home>

²⁹ How to issue European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) <https://europa.eu/europass/en/how-issue-european-digital-credentials#>

²⁰ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts (2022/C 243/03)



4.5.4 Strengthening skills intelligence

The first step to make sure people can acquire the skills they need for a current or future job is up-to-date information on skills needs. But often skills intelligence comes too late to inform them to make a data based choice. This means that accessible, easily understandable, targeted and up-to-date skills intelligence is necessary. Besides graduate tracking surveys and administrative data matching, for further statistical analysis, artificial intelligence and bigdata analysis have a great potential. Artificial Intelligence and big data can be applied to define new job profiles in different sectors based on the specific skill sets required.

To strengthen and disseminate skills intelligence, the European Commission will:

- Support the development of new and deepened skills intelligence, including at regional and sectoral levels. Partnerships to use data from private job portals and national skills intelligence will be explored.
- Centralise and widely disseminate skills intelligence through the Pact for Skills, in synergy with the European Research Area.
- Promote the participation of social partners in labour market projections and the identification of training needs to develop skills intelligence
- Encourage the use of skills intelligence by the public and private employment services and in particular, encourage the public employment services (PES) network to promote the early identification of skills' shortages and trends, linked to growing job opportunities, including to better draw on the potential of intra-EU mobility and migration from third countries²¹.
- Present skills intelligence information tailored to individuals' needs in Europass, the EU platform for people to manage their learning and careers. This will assist individuals in their study, training and work choices, and help counsellors and mentors, inter alia in Public Employment Services, but not only in PES, also in sectoral skills centres/observatories.

4.5.5 Skills for life

Open, democratic societies depend on active citizens who can discern information from various sources, identify disinformation, take informed decisions, are resilient and act responsibly. The European Agenda for Adult Learning²² has facilitated European cooperation in this area for the last decade. More needs to be done to support people to acquire the above-mentioned skills, and to reinforce Upskilling Pathways²³ for adults, in particular for those with a lower level of skills and qualifications. This goes beyond skilling for a job, and includes voluntary work, as an example, this can also be used for older people who equally need new skills.

The European Commission, together with the Member States, will work on new priorities for the European Agenda for Adult Learning to complement the renewed European cooperation framework in education and training and to support the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)²⁴. It will aim towards building comprehensive, qualitative and inclusive adult learning systems. These shall

²¹ European Network of Public Employment Services: *Future skills, career guidance and lifelong learning in PES Thematic paper*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

²² See Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030 (2021/C 504/02)

²³ See Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016/C 484/01)

²⁴ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



reach out to all, including seniors and in particular those people most in need of access to learning, including through distance and online learning. It will prioritise non-formal, life-wide learning, intergenerational, intercultural and community learning. Local learning centres, libraries and the wider community and civil society will be supported to work together to motivate and enable adults to learn, thus supporting crisis resilience.

In addition to the initiatives promoted directly by the Commission, the actions described above can be implemented by transnational projects carried out by organizations located in different Member States which can benefit from funding through the Erasmus program or other European programs.

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5

**Other EU initiatives to promote access
to VET and the quality of training**

5. Other European Union initiatives to promote access to VET and the quality of training

5.1 European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)

Evidence suggests that countries with a strong vocational education and training (VET) and apprenticeship system have lower levels of youth unemployment. Apprenticeships ease the **transition from education and training to work**. They combine company-based training with school-based education, and lead to a nationally recognised qualification when completed. Often there is a contractual relationship between the employer and the apprentice, with the apprentice being paid for their work.

A major focus on Apprenticeship has been introduced by the **Council Recommendation** of 15 March 2018 *on a European Framework for Quality and effective Apprenticeships*²⁵. According to this Recommendation Member States should ensure that apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour market needs and provide benefits to both learners and employers.

To be effective, apprenticeship schemes should respect the following criteria for quality:

- *Written agreement*, to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice and the employer related to learning and working conditions.
- *Learning outcomes* agreed by the employers, VET institutions and trade unions.
- *Pedagogical support*, to provide guidance to apprentices ensuring mutual and regular feed-back.
- *Workplace component*: at least half of the apprenticeship should be carried out in the workplace
- *Pay and/or compensation* in line with national, sectoral or collective requirements
- *Social protection, health and safety conditions* compliant with relevant rules and regulations
- *Involvement of Social partners* in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes
- *Support*, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized companies
- *Flexible pathways and mobility*
- *Career guidance, mentoring and learner support*
- *Quality assurance*: Quality assurance approaches should be in place taking into account the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET),

In July 2020, The European Commission renewed the program European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)²⁶, launched in 2013, giving new impetus²⁶ to the EU commitment towards apprenticeships. The European Alliance for Apprenticeship is a platform which brings together governments and key stakeholders, like chambers, VET providers, regions, youth representatives, think tanks and social partners. The common goal is to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeship in Europe, while also

²⁵ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (2018/C 153/01)

²⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en>



promoting the mobility of apprentices. These aims are promoted through national commitments and voluntary pledges from stakeholders.

EAFa is a platform for sharing experiences and learning from best practices which allows members to:

- find partners
- promote events
- develop new ideas and activities
- provide access to the latest news and tools on apprenticeships

The renewed EAFa promotes national coalitions, supports SMEs and reinforces the involvement of social partners including at sectoral level, as well as mobilises local and regional authorities and supports the representation of apprentices in the Member States. In addition, the renewed alliance will address important horizontal issues such as gender, social inclusion and the internationalisation of VET.

Material on implementing quality apprenticeships can be found at Cedefop, the European Agency on VET development (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/apprenticeships>)

5.2 Erasmus +

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It has a budget of €26.2 billion (2021-2027). This is nearly double the funding compared to its predecessor programme (2014-2020).

The 2021-2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life.

It supports priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan and the European Skills Agenda.

Erasmus+ offers mobility and cooperation opportunities in the areas of:

- higher education
- vocational education and training
- school education (including early childhood education and care)
- adult education
- youth
- sport

In order to achieve its objectives, the Erasmus+ Programme foresees the implementation of 3 Key Actions:

- Key Action 1 is focussed on individuals, and supports their mobility.
- Key action 2 is focussed on organizations and supports partnerships to work together on strategic issues.
- Key action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation: .



Learning mobility of Individuals (Key Action 1)

This Key Action aims to encourage learning mobility of students, staff, trainees, apprentices, youth workers and young people. The role of the organisations in this process is to organise these opportunities for individuals. The benefits for the organisations include an increased capacity to operate at an international level, improved management skills, access to more funding opportunities and projects, increased ability to prepare, manage, and follow-up projects, a more attractive portfolio of opportunities for students and staff at participating organisations, the opportunity to develop innovative projects with partners from around the world.

At the following link, you can find the contact details of all the ERASMUS+ National Agencies Offices:
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-agencies>

Cooperation among organisations and institutions (Key Action 2)

This Key Action supports:

- Partnerships for Cooperation, including Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships;
- Partnerships for Excellence, including Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and Erasmus Mundus Action;
- Partnerships for Innovation, including Alliances and Forward-looking projects;
- Capacity Building projects in the fields of higher education, vocational education and training, youth and sport;
- Not-for-profit European sport events.

The Actions supported under this Key Action are expected to contribute significantly to the priorities of the programme, to bring positive and long-lasting effects on the participating organisations, on the policy systems in which such Actions are framed as well as on the organisations and persons directly or indirectly involved in the organised activities.

This Key Action is expected to result in the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels.

Support to policy development and cooperation (Key action 3)

Key Action 3 provides support to policy cooperation at European Union level, thereby contributing to the implementation of existing policies and the development of new policies, which can trigger modernisation and reforms, at European Union, and systems' level, in the fields of education, training youth and sport. Key Action 3 covers many other Actions in support of policy reform in the education, training and youth fields that are implemented directly by the European Commission or through specific calls for proposals managed by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)



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6

**A new approach to quality assurance:
Peer-review**

6. A new approach to quality assurance: Peer review

An external evaluation model that is gaining considerable interest at international level is what is known as Peer Review. A peer review is a form of external evaluation that supports the reviewed VET provider in its quality assurance efforts through a 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. Peer review can be implemented in national or transnational context. Transnational peer reviews involve international peers that assess VET providers alongside national peers.

Peer review is intended for VET providers that implement internal quality assurance procedures and self-evaluation and who want to obtain feedback from colleagues on the quality of certain aspects of VET provision or the VET provider. VET providers participate in Peer Reviews voluntarily.

The idea behind the choice of the Peer Review is that no one better than an expert colleague can enter into the merits and therefore express an opinion on the proposed work. In fact, the Peers or "critical friends" are not inspectors, but colleagues from other VET providers, independent and equal to those whose performance is assessed. Working in a similar environment, they have specific professional expertise on the evaluated subject. They generally include teachers/ trainers, counsellors and quality coordinators at VET providers and have experience in reviewing areas related to VET provision, teaching and training, quality assurance and quality development. Transnational peer reviews are conducted in a team of at least four peers, at least one of whom is from a different country than the VET provider.

Peer review can be organized between two VET providers, who agree to organize a mutual evaluation; the providers that organize the Peer review can be even more than two, and in this case, they organize a circular pattern of visits: A peer reviews B, who peer reviews C, who peer reviews A; or A is reviewed by two peers belonging to B and two peers belonging to C, and so on. In the peer team, an external evaluation expert may also be included, who ensures that the evaluation is carried out effectively.

The peer review methodology for VET providers was developed in the Leonardo da Vinci project "Peer Review in initial VET" by a team of experts from seven European countries. It has since then been tested in 25 transnational Peer Reviews involving 8 European countries²⁷.

6.1 The phases of Peer Review

Peer reviews comprise the following stages: preparation, peer visit, reporting, improvement actions and evaluation.

In the *preparatory phase*, the VET provider identifies the Peers and the areas of activity (defined as Quality Areas), which will be examined by the group of Peers; in fact, the procedure provides that, given the limited time and limited resources, the provider is not evaluated on all the activities, but only on some. Generally, the most critical areas are chosen by the provider, with respect to which input and indications from competent external Peers are requested, but **an area of excellence** can also be chosen which is intended to be enhanced and strengthened.

²⁷ <http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/peer-review.php>.

Subsequently, the provider subjected to evaluation draws up a **self-evaluation report** and sends it to the group of Peers; this report must be prepared by the school/training facility being assessed at least one month before the visit. The group of Peers examines the content of the Self-Evaluation Report and prepares the visit plan, identifying the aspects to be investigated, the data and other information to be collected, the people to be interviewed, etc. If necessary, the school structure is requested before the visit, further information or clarifications are demanded etc....

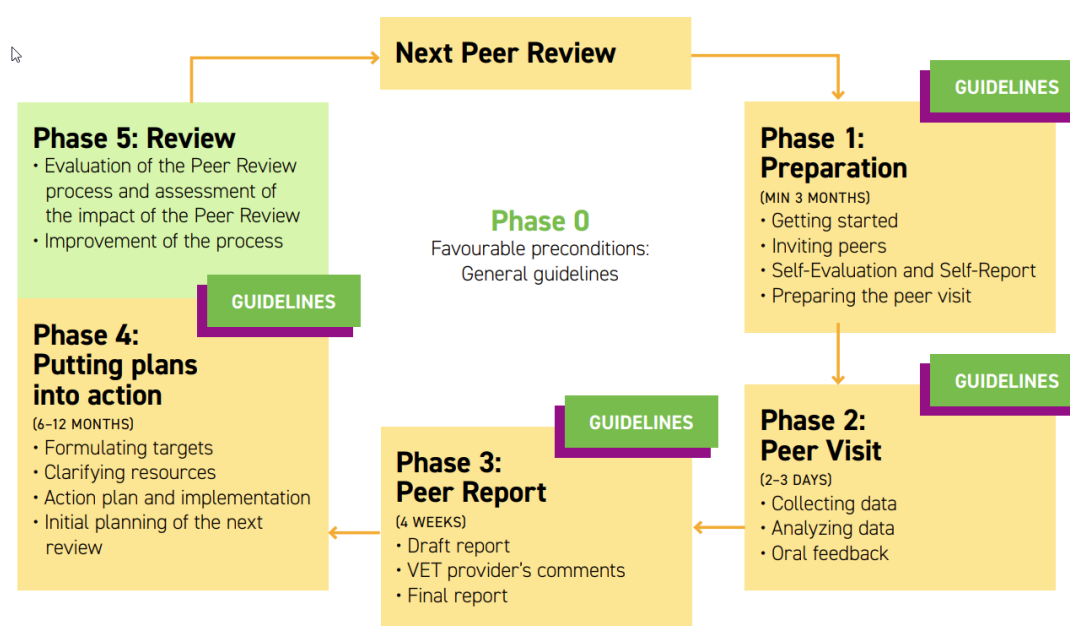
In the **second phase** the visit of the Peers takes place, which can last between 1 and 3 days (depending of the level of preparation and the depth of the review; during the visit, the premises and equipment of the structure are visited and interviews are conducted with the interested parties (internal staff, students, families, businesses, any other stakeholders). Focus groups can be held with internal and/or external representatives of the training structure. The documentation is collected and possibly a direct observation is also carried out. At the end of the visit, a verbal feedback session is conducted (communication of the first conclusions of the Peers and any recommendations).

In the **third phase**, within 4 weeks of the visit, the group of Peers (within which a coordinator is identified) prepares and sends the draft of the Evaluation Report. The VET provider can express its reflections, which are followed by an adaptation of the draft report into a Final Report.

In the **fourth phase**, based on the results of the Peer Review and the recommendations received, the training structure draws up an improvement plan (containing the indication of objectives to be achieved, actions to be carried out, time required, resources to be used, etc.) and schedules the next Peer Review visit, which will make it possible to verify the progress made with respect to the critical issues identified.

Finally, in the **fifth and final phase**, the training structure will carry out an evaluation of the impact of the Peer review and the results achieved²⁸.

Figure 2: Phases of the European Peer Review



²⁸ The European manual can be found at <http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/manual.php>

6.2 Benefits of Peer Review

VET providers benefit from peer reviews by:

- confirming the quality of VET provision
- receiving critical, yet supportive feedback on the quality of VET provision from peers
- presenting strengths and achievements
- enhancing accountability towards stakeholders
- identifying blind spots and weaknesses
- mutual learning and sharing best practices with peers
- establishing networks and cooperation with other VET providers
- sharing best practices across countries and obtaining an international perspective on the quality of VET provision through transnational peer reviews.

Peer reviews rely on confidentiality, impartiality and transparent criteria. The assessment is performed with a focus on the needs of VET provider under assessment. A committed, open and inquisitive attitude is needed as a prerequisite for mutual learning and a culture of continuous quality improvement.

7

The path for curriculum recognition
in the EU

7. The path for curriculum recognition in the EU

Improving procedures for the mutual recognition of qualifications in EU Member States is a cornerstone of establishing a European Education Area by 2025.

The European Commission has been working for some time to support and facilitate the mobility of learners, workers and professionals across the EU countries. Many of the EU policies implemented in the Vocational Education and Training area aim to enhance these mobilities within the European Union. Others aim to benefit overall both the EU educational systems and the EU industrial systems, due the increasing need to find schooled professionals with up-to-date knowledge, skills and competencies to ensure the proper functioning and to enhance the competitiveness of the EU companies.

A key element for facilitating these mobilities is the official recognition of the qualifications of workers and students among the EU countries. The key precondition is the recognition of these qualifications at national/regional level

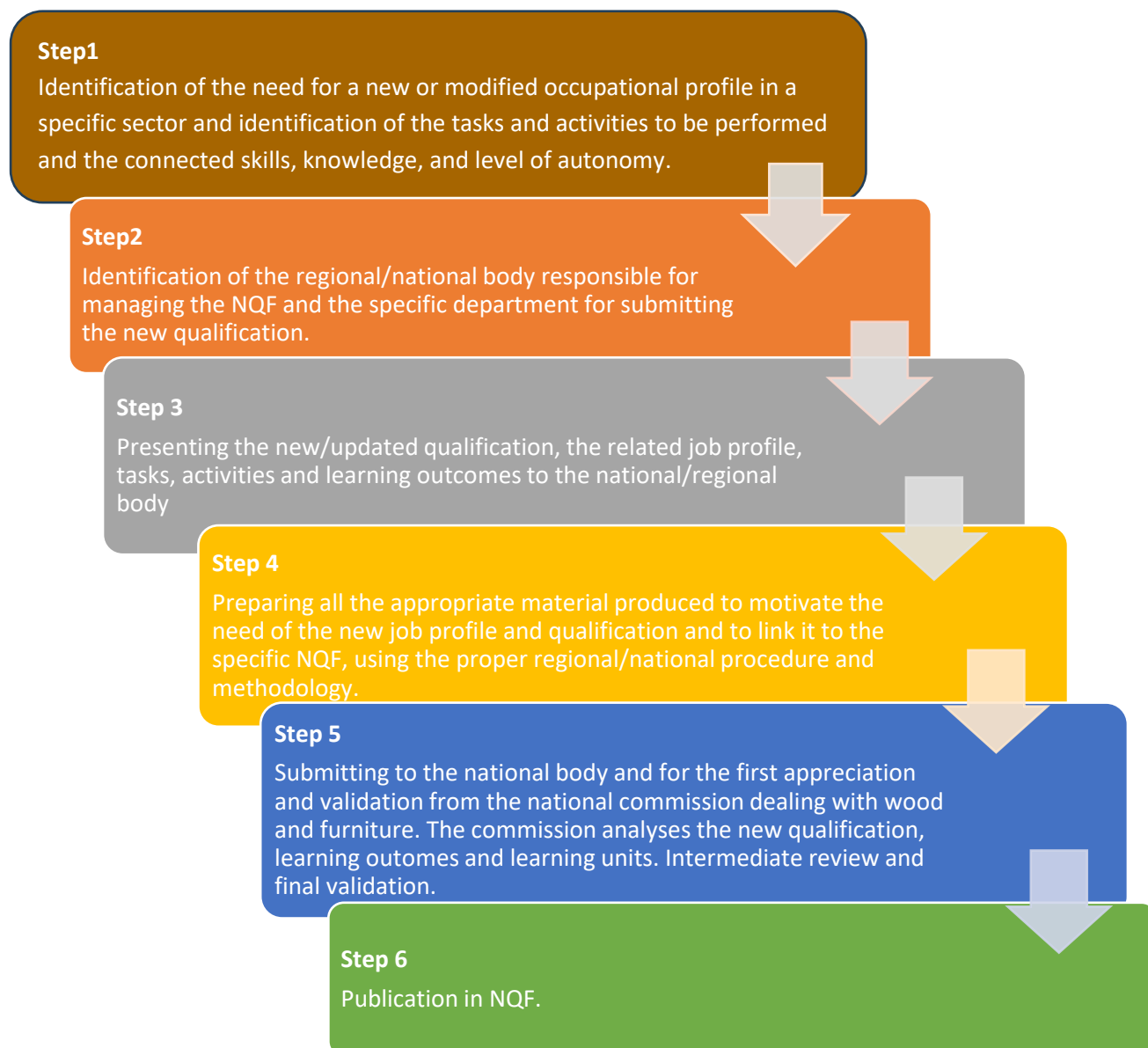
In this chapter we want to present shortly which are the main steps that are required across the EU to obtain an official recognition of a new curriculum. These recognitions are issued by the national/regional competent bodies (VET regulatory entities). Systems and processes are not exactly the same across the different countries, but there are some key features and steps that are common to the majority of them.

After having identified the new professional profile which is needed, the subsequent step is to identify the tasks and the activities that should be performed by the new profile; based on these, one should describe which are the skills, knowledge and level of autonomy which are needed to successfully perform these tasks and activities and identify the learning outcomes to be reached by the trainees through the new training activity. These learning outcomes should be matched with the descriptors of the EQF framework to check which EQF level the new qualification corresponds to; based on this analysis the EQF level of the new qualification should be defined.

When the learning outcomes are well defined and the new qualification is officially recognized, the complete curriculum may be defined and detailed. VET providers, when designing the related course, can produce personalized curricula that include all the needed learning outcomes. They can add additional learning outcomes to make the curriculum more relevant for the national or regional stakeholders.

Once this is ensured, the key question is how to get a formal recognition of a new curriculum? Which are the national bodies responsible for this formal recognition? In the following scheme, we show the key steps that are common to all countries. It is important to remember that a curriculum recognition should be submitted in each European country, respecting the formal requirements foreseen at national or regional level. For each curriculum a specific level will be assigned according to the NQF.

Figure 3: representation of a usual path for curriculum recognition in the EU (Not applicable to all EU Countries).





A practical example: the situation in Belgium:

Step 1: the sector decides to make up a clusterview of related occupational profiles.

Step 2: these occupational profiles are written out by the sector with a clear view on the tasks and related skills, knowledge and competencies. In this occupational profiles, there is an indication of the number of workers/employees within this profession, a number of the needs (yearly) or vacancies, what (official) certifications are needed etc...

Step 3: a committee with experts in the field of labour market and education revises these occupational profiles and – based upon the information in the dossier – a relevant NOF level will be given.

Step 4: If the sector agrees, this will be published in the national database of occupational profiles. If the sector disagrees, the dossier can be adapted and goes back to step 2 and 3.

Once there is a recognised and published occupational profile, there is a possibility to train workers, unemployed people and even students, to be awarded with an occupational qualification. In some cases, such a professional or occupational qualification can be awarded by a sectoral organisation, if they are recognised by the Ministry of Education.

Step 5: educational partners can elaborate curricula, based upon these occupational profiles. A complete curriculum dossier needs to be developed by the educational partners and must be sent to the dedicated sectoral organisation for agreement.

Step 6: when both partners: education and sector agree, the dossier is sent to the Ministry of Education and the curriculum can be recognised by the Minister of Education.

Step 7: the curriculum is published, and schools and educational centres can organise the curriculum, that will be awarded with an educational qualification. An educational qualification comprises always one or more professional qualifications.

An educational qualification must be issued by a recognised educational institute, school, high school ,or university.



**Key outcomes and lessons of the 2022
Forum on Vocational Excellence**

8. Key outcomes and lessons of the 2022 Forum on Vocational Excellence

8.1. Details of the event

The **2022 Forum on Vocational Excellence**²⁹ was held on November 15 and 16, 2022 at the TABAKALERA International centre for contemporary culture in San Sebastian, Spain. It was the first international meeting of partners involved in initiatives on **Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE)**, organized jointly by the Basque government, the European Commission, and representatives of the Community of Practice (CoP) on CoVE, with support from the European Training Foundation (ETF), the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), and the Katapult network. The event had 735 registered participants from 88 countries (with 285 in person in San Sebastian and 450 watching the event online). The majority of conference attendees were partners from current Erasmus+ CoVE projects as well as other vocational excellence initiatives, intending to establish wide networks and cooperation in VET across Europe and the globe.

The Forum aimed to expand the network of participating VET centres and relevant stakeholders in the education and VET community as well as to promote and raise awareness of current and ongoing CoVE projects and training centres from across Europe working on initiatives within vocational excellence.

The event was divided into a few general discussion sessions:

- The Basque Vocational Education and Training model of excellence in a new global order,
- Excellence in a new global order,
- Skills for the future,
- From policy to practise – Examples of Vocational Excellence,
- VET fit for the future – the role of Vocational Excellence,
- The National Implementation Plans and Vocational Excellence,
- Vocational Excellence for Social Inclusion,
- Vocational Excellence for the Green and Digital Transition,
- The European Universities Initiative and Centres of Vocational Excellence.

Additionally, the Forum was partitioned into three parallel rounds on the following topics:

Round 1

- Vocational Excellence for Social Inclusion,
- Public-private partnership: the key success factors,
- Managing CoVE projects (sustainability and impact),.

Round 2

- Applied research,
- Learner and staff mobility,
- The Erasmus+ calls for CoVEs and matchmaking.

²⁹ More information on 2022 Forum on Vocational Excellence can be found at: <https://copcoves.eu/2022-forum-on-vocational-excellence>

Round 3

- Skills for smart specialisation and industrial clusters,
- CoVEs for Lifelong Learning,
- Experimental Learning.

8.2. Key outcomes and lessons

Discussions during the Forum were comprehensive and rife with examples of successful strategies from different European countries.

The key outcomes and lessons drawn from the event can be formulated as follows:

- Future developments in digital technologies, faster curriculum updates, lifelong learning, and the permeability of VET with higher education will all **increase the relevance of VET** while also making it even more pertinent,
- **VET centres should be profoundly linked to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)** and their ecosystems, providing them with strategic insights and actions,
- The future success of Vocational Education and Training Systems will be **greatly influenced by interschool collaborations, the inclusion of people with disabilities, the inclusion of the digital world, the inclusion of inclusive entrepreneurship and start-up support, as well as the inclusion of people from all genders,**
- In modern European educational systems, **EU financing and policy developments are of the highest importance,**
- Despite its high cost in practice, **skills forecasting in VET** plays a significant function,
- The European Commission supports the development of VET in a variety of ways, including ensuring a **fair transition to climate neutrality, learning for environmental sustainability, individual learning accounts, and micro-credentials.** These are excellent opportunities for all European countries to participate in the **development of green and digital skills in VET.**

9

**New European Bauhaus
(NEB) Academy**

9. New European Bauhaus (NEB)

In spite of the fact that this NEB initiative is not directly related with skills development, it includes as well the New European Bauhaus Academy (NEBA), and we consider important to present it as an interesting further development for future training and skills, especially in relation to the Circular Economy transition of our wood and furniture sector. In this framework we want to present as a positive example of further development within our sectors, the launch of Wood Sector Alliance for the New European Bauhaus new created network focusing on training and skills development.

9.1. New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)**³⁰ is a creative and integrative initiative launched by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in September 2020. **NEB** connects the **European Green Deal**³² (European Union's strategy for reaching the 2050 goal which is, among the others, no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and economic growth no longer linked to resource usage in Europe) to our living spaces and experiences.

New European Bauhaus inspires a movement that supports and oversees the development of our society in combination with three indivisible values:

- Sustainability, from goals related to climate change, circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity, to a harmonious connection with nature, the environment, and our planet as a whole,
- Aesthetics, quality of experience, and style that go beyond usefulness guided by art and culture, as well as responding to requirements that reach out with functionality,
- Inclusivity, from respecting diversity to ensuring accessibility and affordability, to facilitating cross-cultural, disciplinary, gender, and age dialogue.

The goal of the initiative is both a network and a point of contact at the intersection of culture, social integration, and innovation enabling all Europeans to work alongside to create sustainable and inclusive future.

9.2. Wood Sector Alliance for the New European Bauhaus (Wood4Bauhaus)

Wood Sector Alliance for the New European Bauhaus (Wood4Bauhaus)³² was launched by the European wood-based sector in response to the European Commission's **New European Bauhaus** initiative.

Founding members of the Alliance are European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois), the European Panel Federation (EPF), the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry (EOS), the European

³⁰ More information on the New European Bauhaus can be found at https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/about-initiative_en

³¹ More information on the Green Deal policy can be found at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/>

³² More information on the W4Bauhaus Alliance can be found at <https://wood4bauhaus.eu>



Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), and InnovaWood, with support from the project consortia BASAJAUN, WoodCircus, and EcoReFibre with funding from the EU Horizon 2020 programme.

With the objective to highlight the adaptability of **innovative wood products and building systems**, raise **awareness of the transformative power of the Circular Economy**, and facilitate focused **co-creation partnerships with the wood sector** for the New European Bauhaus, Wood4Bauhaus seeks to establish an open platform that brings together its diverse stakeholders.

The Alliance additionally endeavours to:

- Encourage inquiry and invention for new and inventive applications of wood in the built environment,
- Advocate for new partnerships and co-creations between different stakeholders from a variety of disciplines, industries, and society,
- Facilitate the development of skills and knowledge, particularly for the benefit of future generations.

In addition, **Wood4Bauhaus** directly contributes to the New European Bauhaus group, for instance by submitting documents to the European Commission (documents submitted in June 2021: "**Research Needs and Priorities Supporting Sustainable Construction with Nature-based Materials under the European Green Deal**" and "**Policy recommendations to Encourage Nature-based Materials Like Wood in Construction and Renovation of the Built Environment**").

9.3. New European Bauhaus Academy (NEBA)

The NEB Academy³³ on skills for sustainable construction is one of the key initiatives of the **European Year of Skills 2023**, launched by the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative in November 2022.

The NEB Academy emphasizes a focus on research and innovation and offers the necessary skills from an extractive, mineral-based and fossil hydrocarbon-fuelled construction economy to a regenerative bio-economy and circular system of material reuse, including the construction industry's transition to a greener economy. The NEB Academy embraces a **systematic approach to sustainable construction**, taking into account all the stages and **linkages in the value chain of the industry**, which is consistent with the integrated methodology of the New European Bauhaus.

The first priority areas are identified knowledge deficiencies in the application of **bio-based materials**, **digital technologies**, and **improved circularity in buildings**. There will be a number of NEB Academy Hubs established around Europe that can combine the necessary knowledge to provide convenient access to **up-and-re-skilling** content via **shared training** and **e-learning platforms**.

³³ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/neb-academy_en



9.3.1. New European Bauhaus Academy Pioneer Hub (NEBAP Hub)

The University of Primorska in Slovenia in collaboration with InnoRenew CoE, Czech, Technical University in Prague, Tallinn University of Technology, InnovaWood, Bauhaus Earth, University of Sopron, University of Florence, Latvian State Institute of Wood Chemistry, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava,

Polytechnic University of Valencia, Danish Technological Institute, Xyhlo Biofinish and RISE established the **New European Bauhaus Academy Pioneer Hub for Sustainable Built Environments with Renewable Materials** (NEBAP Hub). By bringing together diverse institutions, the NEBAP Hub's major goal is to **hasten the decarbonization of houses and structures**. These institutions will work together to create innovative training and upskilling programs for **ACE (Architecture, Construction, and Engineering)** professionals. In addition, it aims to influence legislators, educators and students, investors, insurers, and standardization organizations.

For the construction industry, the NEBAP Hub will provide **offline and online training** on the use of **bio-based materials, digital technologies, and increased circularity** that will **accelerate the decarbonization of houses and structures** in Europe and beyond. International professionals collaborate on the Council Board and Management Board, which direct the Hub.

10

**List of documents and website
containing relevant additional
information**



10. List of documents and website containing relevant additional information

The following section include a list of links to documents and websites related with different aspects and topics of EU VET and EQAVET that can provide additional information to readers interested in these.

Documents

Quality Assurance in Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) Synthesis Report from the EQAVET Peer Learning Activity 7-8 October 2021 - Prepared by the EQAVET Secretariat. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/bczV3>

EQAVET Peer Review on Vocational education and training pathways for persons in employment: quality assurance of the work-based learning component - Flash Report <https://shorturl.at/eoCW2>

Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework - EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016 – 2017 <https://shorturl.at/tOPUZ>

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01))

Websites

CEDEFOP - <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en>

EQAVET - European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1536&langId=en>

EQAVET Indicators' Toolkit | <https://skillman.eu/>

ESCO *European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations*. Available at: <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en>

Europass - <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

European Education Area - <https://education.ec.europa.eu>

European Training Foundation <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en>

Individual learning accounts and micro-credentials
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_6477

VET Toolbox - <https://vettoolbox.eu/>

11

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COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020/C 417/01) Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&qid=1688398583811](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&qid=1688398583811)

COUNCIL RESOLUTION on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030 (2021/C 504/02). Available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214\(01\)&qid=1688398817897](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214(01)&qid=1688398817897)

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* {SWD(2020) 121 final}. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0121&qid=1688398683100> - {SWD(2020) 122 final} <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0122&qid=1688398718338>

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