IQAVET

NATIONAL REFERENCE POINT IRELAND

The Irish Quality Assurance Network for Vocational Education and Training (IQAVET)

Collaborating for Impact in Quality Assurance – together across Europe...

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

QQI
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

EQAVET
European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

The Irish Quality Assurance Network for Vocational Education and Training (IQAVET)

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EQAVET European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

IQAVET National Reference Point Ireland

QQI Quality and Qualifications Ireland Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

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FOREWORD

Dear Colleagues,

I was pleased to launch the IQAVET Network at the inaugural seminar in June as you considered the important issue of data and evidence to underpin the evaluation of quality. I have monitored closely your engagement with issues at European level and nationally since and am proud that QQI is leading in facilitating this dialogue.

Communities of practice such as EQAVET on the European stage, and IQAVET here at home are vital in providing the core strength and resilience that underpins progress on so many complex issues. Making VET more attractive and more effective, ensuring that we have people who have knowledge, skill and competence for sustainable participation in rapidly evolving workforces are long-term tasks. We achieve our best only when we lean on and support each other. 'Athnaíonn ciaróg, ciaróg eile', our Irish proverb tells us, and the IQAVET network is one where likeminded people can share important perspectives and surface important learning together. We are always more than the sum of our parts.

The work of IQAVET in 2016 was funded in part through an Erasmus+ grant, and has clearly supported national priorities and brought new energy and insight to the work. Reading the report and focusing on the 'Takeaway learning' from each seminar, your voices can clearly be heard. Leading a quality assurance and qualifications agency, your belief systems and recommendations strongly reflect the fundamental beliefs behind our policy positions. Governance is an enabler; it 'brings the bulls to the table' and helps us to drive a service that is really learner and outcome oriented. The EQAVET indicators, including those under development in EQAVET+, help us to ensure that these are current and relevant and will meet twenty-first century needs for all our citizens, not for the infrastructures we have inherited. We focus on quality and not quality assurance, but use quality assurance to drive that focus. Your desire to work expertly in the quality and quality assurance field with skill and understanding is inspiring. System wise and from a national policy infrastructure position, you find again and again that we are consistent with the EQAVET Framework and yet that we are not necessarily drawing down full value from it in practical terms. I look forward to your progress as you continue in that journey.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the volunteer Steering Group, Alan Hogan (Limerick Clare Education and Training Board), Martha Bolger (Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board,) Anne Higgins and Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha (Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board) and Siobhan Magee (Further Education Support Service). My hope, along with the team here in QQI, led by Dr Bryan Maguire, Director of Quality Assurance, is that the learning shared and the tools you have developed and refined within this project, are of use nationally as you continue to lead at regional level on governance, data and evidence planning and self-evaluation.

With every good wish for continued success,

Padraig Walsh

Dr Padraig Walsh
Chief Executive

INTRODUCTION

WHAT?

This publication provides an overview of an EU funded project and other activities conducted throughout 2016 by the Irish Quality Assurance Network for Vocational Education and Training (IQAVET).

WHO?

IQAVET is the National Reference Point (NRP) for EQAVET, which is the European Quality Assurance network for Vocational Education and Training. IQAVET is based at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). As an NRP, IQAVET is responsible for supporting quality assurance (QA) arrangements in the Irish context, while drawing on, and contributing to, resources and experiences available throughout the EU. In other words, IQAVET is essentially putting the 'Irish' into EQAVET!

FOR WHOM?

IQAVET is open to all VET practitioners who have an interest in exchanging their unique experiences on QA, through a trusting and transparent community of practice in conjunction with national and international colleagues.

WHY?

IQAVET is a community within which rich learning and experiences can be exchanged to help progress good practice in QA amongst VET practitioners in Ireland to ultimately benefit all learners and, in addition, is a mechanism through which the Irish voice can actively contribute to discussions on policies and initiatives that impact on our work.

In 2016, IQAVET was awarded project funding under Erasmus+ to support the implementation of the tasks assigned to them by the EQAVET Recommendation - but what is EQAVET all about?

BACKGROUND

THE HISTORY - AN OVERVIEW OF EQAVET

What?
EQAVET is a European instrument in place to support the development of national systems for quality assurance in VET.

When?
EQAVET was adopted following the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of The Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training – commonly known as the **EQAVET Recommendation**.

The EQAVET Recommendation results from a long history of collaboration in the area of VET - back to the Treaty of Rome (1957) which foresaw cooperation in VET! The Recommendation was particularly influenced by the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration of European Ministers in charge of Vocational Education and Training (VET) which stated that European cooperation in VET should, inter alia, promote cooperation in quality assurance with a particular focus on the exchange of models and methods, in addition to common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.

Why?
The EQAVET Recommendation determines **two main objectives** for this European tool:

1. To continually enhance national quality assurance systems by facilitating cooperation and mutual learning in conjunction with the testing and development of guidance material, and providing information on quality developments in VET across Member States
2. To promote active participation of all Member States in the framework network to contribute to relevant policy development through concrete proposals and initiatives, thus, increasing transparency of VET

Who?
The EQAVET Secretariat is currently hosted at QQI; its main responsibilities are to:

- Provide expertise in the field of quality assurance in VET to progress work of the Network, in particular the work of the national reference points
- Coordinate, in close cooperation with the Commission and the Member States the reporting activities required as laid down in the Recommendation
- Provide expert support and input in the drafting of various documents and the activities of working groups
- Communicate and disseminate the outcomes of the Network to contribute effectively to the enhancement of quality assurance in VET within and across EU

How?
The EQAVET Recommendation has two parts:

1. The core document which states the intentions and objectives of EQAVET and which defines the activities that Member States and the European Commission should put in place in order to implement EQAVET;
2. The Annexes that contain the EQAVET framework – The quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review

This cycle is supported by quality criteria and a set of specific descriptors for each phase. Descriptors are defined for both system-level quality assurance and provider level quality assurance (Annex I).

ANNEX I

THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK: QUALITY CRITERIA AND INDICATIVE DESCRIPTORS[1]

This annex proposes common quality criteria and indicative descriptors to support Member States, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the Framework[2].

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/ objectives, actions and indicators	Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria) Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results outcomes subject to national/regional data protection requirements Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined	European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/individual needs Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place

1. For the purposes of this recommendation, definitions which apply are based on Cedefop's Glossary on Quality in Training (working paper, November 2003).
2. A further set of selected quality indicators is detailed in Annex II.

Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation	Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance
Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate Early warning systems are implemented Performance indicators are applied Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/ frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders Early warning systems are implemented

Review	Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised Systems are adjusted accordingly Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available	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 Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place

Annex II provides a set of 10 indicators to monitor quality in VET.

ANNEX II

A REFERENCE SET OF SELECTED QUALITY INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING QUALITY IN VET

This Annex proposes a comprehensive set of selected quality indicators which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers. The set of indicators will be further developed through European cooperation on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis, building on European data and national registers.

In terms of their nature and purpose, they should be distinguished from the indicators and benchmarks referred to in the Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training.

Furthermore, the table of indicators does not include aggregated indicators at national level in cases where these do not exist or are difficult to obtain. The aggregation of such indicators at national level can be carried out at a later stage on the basis of a joint agreement between the Member States, the Commission and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network.

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance		
No 1 Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers: (a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative (b) share of accredited VET providers	Context/Input indicator	Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level Increase the transparency of quality of training Improve mutual trust on training provision
No 2 Investment in training of teachers and trainers: (a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training (b) amount of funds invested	Input/Process indicator	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

Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies		
No 3 Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes[1], according to the type of programme and the individual criteria[2]	Input/Process/Output indicator	Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups
No 4 Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Process/Output/Outcome indicator	Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
No 5 Placement rate in VET programmes: (a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria[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	Outcome indicator	Support employability Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
No 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	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)	Increase employability Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
Context information		
No 7 Unemployment rate[4] according to individual criteria	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level

1. For IVT: 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.
3. For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.
4. Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.

No 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	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups
No 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	Context/Input indicator (qualitative information)	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support employability
No 10 Schemes used to promote better access to VET: (a) information on existing schemes at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	Process indicator (qualitative information)	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision

The Annexes are intended to be used as a toolbox; to provide a framework to support Member States' efforts in developing quality assurance, whilst preserving the necessity for diversity of approaches given unique local contexts.

To drive implementation forward on a national level, the EQAVET Recommendation called for the establishment of a Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET that is linked to the particular structures and requirements of each Member State and which brings together all regional and national stakeholders concerned. The remit of National Reference Points is detailed in the Recommendation and they should:

- keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the activities of the framework network,
- provide active support for the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,
- take concrete initiatives to promote further development of the framework in the national context,
- support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance which allows the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement in respect of the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,
- ensure that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively.

IN CONTEXT - THE MISSION AND VISION OF EQAVET

Mission

To develop, disseminate and promote best European practice in the field of quality assurance in VET at system and provider levels by supporting the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and fostering sustainable and inclusive activities-oriented cooperation among relevant stakeholders at different levels

Vision

To support the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation by working collectively to build a shared understanding of quality assurance and development among member countries and social partners through exchanging experiences and generating new insights that can influence policy and practice at national and local levels

IQAVET - LINKING IRELAND WITH EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICE IN QA!

BACKGROUND

IQAVET was established at QQI as a national network of quality assurance practitioners under the auspices of the NRP. The location of the Irish NRP was influenced by the synergies expected by the EQAVET Recommendation between EQAVET and other European instruments. Of particular note are the referenced links to implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), particularly around the quality of learning outcomes, in addition to the European Credit system for VET and the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. In fact, Annex 3 of 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 which details the '**Common Principles in Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework**' is taken into account in the EQAVET Recommendation.

When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance - which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and vocational education and training - should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

- 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 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

Given that Ireland has played a strong role among Member States in terms of the development and implementation of Qualifications Frameworks, these principles are useful in guiding the work of IQAVET.

Introducing IQAVET

QQI and previously FETAC, had been the home of the National Reference Point for EQAVET and had supported the work of the Network actively at European level through participation in peer learning activities and working groups, and nationally in ensuring that EQAVET principles and indicators were actively embedded and supported in the quality assurance policy architecture for VET. This involved close collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and working actively with funding agencies, national associations and consultative groups.

For providers and practitioners however, that meant that awareness of the richness and relevance of what EQAVET could bring was somewhat uneven and sporadic; furthermore, the degree of reform and transformation of VET infrastructure nationally has brought radical changes- with all the associated opportunities and challenges- in personnel, management, delivery mechanisms, quality assurance strategies and practices of programmes, funding and delivery. One of our challenges was to find ways to bridge policy discussions of quality assurance issues with those of practitioners in an EQAVET context, creating time for all of us to explore what EQAVET and European experiences might offer us in our work.

> ***'I've been aware of EQAVET for almost a decade. I've never really had time to figure out how rich is it - it's such a pity!'***
> (participant observation at Seminar on Governance, December 12, 2016)

In 2015 a call was made to EQAVET NRPs to submit project proposals for the purpose of accessing funding made available through ERASMUS+ Key Action 3 Support for Policy Reform of the Erasmus+ Programme, 2014-2020, which includes activities related to the EQAVET network.

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the national representative association for the sixteen education and training boards (ETBs), the single biggest provider of publicly funded VET nationally. ETBI works with the ETBs through a series of working groups or collaborative fora, one of which comprised Quality Assurance Practitioners. The NRP approached the ETBI QQI QA Forum and asked for support in proposing and implementing a programme of work in 2016, including establishing a national QA Practitioners Network focused on EQAVET. The Network started modestly, with a volunteer nucleus Steering Group comprising representatives of the ETBs and of the Further Education Support Service. This group has been central in proposing, developing and implementing the 2016 programme of work and indeed, accomplishing more than originally intended.

EQAVET – an invitation

The close working relationship between QQI and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and our common cause in promoting quality in VET richly informed the work of the NRP in drafting the proposed funding proposal. This rich collaboration supported an ambitious project proposal aimed at supporting the deeper embedding of QA and its ownership amongst all colleagues, not just QA practitioners. An important aspect of the project is to help promote and leverage EQAVET principles and indicators to enhance quality in ETB and other VET provision.

The EQAVET Strategic Plan 2016/17 provided three priorities in deepening the work of EQAVET and the project proposal submitted was derived in the main from priorities 2 and 3 while fully acknowledging the centrality of the first priority.

Priority 1: Complementing the current EQAVET Framework in order to ensure continued relevance to the needs of the policy context by developing an EQAVET+ Framework - within national activities

Priority 2: Deepening the culture of quality assurance in VET- the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle

Priority 3: Strengthening mutual co-operation among NRPs in order to address implementation- NRPS and the work with VET providers

The IQAVET Project in a nutshell

Outline Project Plan	
Name	Self-evaluation, Quality Indicators and ETBs
Timeline	1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017
Governance	QQI in conjunction with ETBI and a steering group of volunteers
Purpose	To deepen the culture of QA in ETBs provision through a focus on self-evaluation of the effectiveness of QA processes and to support embedding EQAVET principles and indicators within evaluative cycles.
Drivers	National: Publication of Core Quality Assurance Guidelines by QQI European: EQAVET Strategic Plan 2016-17
Themes	1. Use of Data 2. Self-Evaluation 3. Governance
Outputs	Seminar on each theme, involving the development of a corresponding tool (based on EQAVET) for the Irish context.

Methodology

Our methodology derived in part from a desire to build on what we knew- that despite the challenges of changed environments, good practice in VET had not gone away, even if we could now examine our practices also with additional lens. Being able to share those practices and lens and consider the implications would be helpful as underlying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats would surely be commonly experienced by others, but would also inform emerging local and indeed, national policy and infrastructural responses. Learning from others who may be 'farther down the road' in other sectors or jurisdictions would equally offer us alternate lens and would inform our thinking. **Case studies** and **guest speakers**, whether national or international would be important for us. ETBs would volunteer to share what they are doing among colleagues, again building on work they had previously undertaken with ETBI.

We committed to trying out '**tool kits**' or templates to shape discussion which QA Officers might use to work on some of the same themes with colleagues in their own provision. We would test these at each seminar, refine them based on feedback and make them available nationally.

Electing **themes for the seminars** took some time, but was determined largely by national priorities and concerns of providers.

VET in Ireland is being underpinned by national data collection systems which in time will yield radical improvements for learners and providers. However, concerns were expressed with regard to 'systems' talking to each other and to the need to build skill in inputting the desired information to obtain the required quality data at the other end. Equally, VET providers making claims as to the quality of the VET for which they are responsible, have little 'hard' data with which to evidence their claims, and whatever about the capacity of emergent data systems to interoperate, certainly this capacity was not previously in existence. While individual initiatives track and measure, the ability of individual providers to link these back to local provision can be limited. These link clearly to Building Block 05, Use data and feedback to inform VET.

Arising from the establishment of QQI and new national policies with regard to Quality Assurance and the amalgamation of former providers leading to the establishment of the ETBs, all education and training boards and other VET providers are engaging in self-evaluation of QA policies and procedures with a view to re-engagement with QQI on the basis of the new policies. Self-evaluation, feedback loops and the identification of improvement plans are not therefore only core to the EQAVET Recommendation, but also central to the concerns of VET practitioners nationally for the coming years. A Seminar focusing on Self Evaluation, particularly in the context of amalgamation and similar entities

in other jurisdictions who had experienced amalgamation and its impact on multiple quality assurance systems was of interest. This also extended and consolidated work previously done by QQI through an 'enhancement' event on Self Evaluation. Further details on this event and all presentations are available on the QQI website. Please see:
www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/FE%20Enhancement%20seminar%202016.aspx

As the year progressed, the focus for the final seminar adjusted to match the increasing clarity in the direction of the self-evaluation reports and improvement plans being undertaken by ETB providers, which would deal with on governance at institutional level. In order to provide fresh perspectives, examples of governance from the State Claims Agency related to the Health Sector were selected. While EQAVET appeared to have less to say about governance directly for providers, interestingly, this seminar yielded confident discussion and interrogation of the EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors and some strong signals about elements of preferred ways forward for the Network.

The presentations and case studies for all Seminars are published on the QQI website. Please see:
www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/IQAVET.aspx

SEMINAR 1: WHAT DATA? WHAT EVIDENCE?

EVALUATING QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICE

The first Seminar was held in June 2016, with attendance by an interesting mix of practitioners - some QA practitioners, some policy workers and some technical data administrators from thirteen ETBs.

Dr Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive of QQI, launched the inaugural seminar, underlining the importance of playing our part in European networks for quality assurance and of mutual trust in the quality of our qualifications, the outcomes of our programmes, the capacity of our graduates as the well acknowledged key to mobility and transparency. Padraig highlighted that under the Bruges Communique, a short term deliverable was the formation of national frameworks for QA and a common QA framework in line with the EQAVET Recommendation. Deliverables for 2020 included the promotion of work based learning, the development of information feedback loops so as to enhance access through flexible and permeable systems and the introduction of systematic approaches to and opportunities for continuous professional development of teachers, trainers and mentors. Looking to the EQAVET Quality Cycle, Padraig observed that it was clear that nationally our focus is on evaluation. From his own experience within the University sector for many years, he noted the absence of data was a significant barrier; as access to data improved, better decisions could be made. QQI is making its own contribution through the infographics and Dr Ray O Neill would be highlighting some of the opportunities this new data source among others brought to quality assurance endeavours. Padraig wished the Network every success.

Andrina Wafer of the **NRP** outlined some of the thinking behind the seminar, including that the data we collect is determined by what we believe the purpose of our system to be. It was proposed that a core belief in the purpose of the quality assurance system will inform the way it is approached and the data that is therefore important to gather. Participants were invited to consider the purposes of QA in discussion - would it for example, assure better teaching? Better teaching and learning? Move the dial from access to success? Deliver employment led learning? Underpin a coherent and accountable integrated service? Depending on the purpose selected, different people and practitioners are impacted. Each might have different data or information to add to inform the success or otherwise of that purpose. Participants were invited briefly discuss data that interested them in direct answer to what they felt the quality assurance system should really deliver.

John McGrath, Manager of the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS gave an insight into how data is used currently to forecast skills needs and employment projections for the workforce but also linking skills research to policy design, bringing it alive in the context of the quality assurance and planning processes of VET.

VET providers often consider the work of the SLMRU through the Skills Ireland website (www.skillsireland.ie) and linking to the Regional Skills Fora and labour market information, looking at county data in anticipating programme provision needs. The SLMRU draws together the annual reports of diverse data systems including e.g. immigration and housing data, quarterly labour force data connected to the census, and live registration data from local employment offices so as to inform a range of national and regional publications. These are important also at individual county level and therefore are relevant to ETBs and other VET providers. SLMRU provide five year national forecasts and enable planning on a regional level, including providing support to ETBs through discussion of labour market 'churn' or movement- not necessarily the creation of new jobs, but flows within employment sectors where people in employment move to other jobs, and where gaps and opportunities are emerging for those with the right skills.

Currently, the SMLRU are piloting an evaluation model, linking different databases, looking at the pre-training characteristics of learners and their post programmatic experiences and what we can learn from this. John commented that it had proven challenging, because of migration and other factors but that ultimately it was intended to enable QA systems to avail of this kind of analysis systematically.

Fiona Maloney, ETB PLSS Co-ordinator at ETBI presented on the Programme and Learner Support System (PLSS) and the data that might assist self-evaluation. Fiona was optimistic that much of the groundwork had been laid with regard to database development and that the next phase of implementation would see providers reaping the benefits of enriched information and analysis. The national programme database, programme calendar and the national learner database are imminently available, and with that all the data therein also becomes available to providers, including voluntary secondary schools and comprehensive schools and ETB providers, for their examination. Previously this work was only visible through a multiplicity of data lens; now in one consolidated form, data to assist self-evaluation and QA processes including linking courses offered with awards obtained, resources, learner data, rates of application, conversion analytics from FETCH, retention data and certification data will now be sourced in a single database.

A topic close to participant's hearts and hands, participants could see the relevance of current available and planned data to quality assurance questions, for example, with regard to non-completion, it would be possible to track the kind of engagement the learner had had, or the wider benefits of their learning, the distance travelled beyond the initial starting point in time.

Dr Ray O Neill, Head of ICT and Procurement, led off an interactive session looking at QQI's infographics (http://infographics.qqi.ie/). Ray asked us to consider what was data, was it just 'numbers, numbers, numbers?' QQI and formerly FETAC provided statistical reports about learner achievement, certification patterns and provision. However, the data indicated that few people looked at them. Making the information visual and appealing opened up accessibility, but cannot be assumed to signify that meaning and understanding of data has necessarily followed. Ray illustrated this with examples of spikes and trends in particular awards which had logical explanations that were not immediately evident. Through the Open Data area, the same information is available in excel sheets, or through the Q-Search facility of the QQI website, the onscreen tool allows for exploration of programmes, awards and providers. Recent data has also been made available to providers on grade distribution which when aligned to other data may add value to the interrogation of particular QA issues. Clearly the nature of data required depends on the nature of the enquiry and should be planned from the outset. Action learning is useful in managing data featuring reflection and qualitative data, quantitative data assists with other kinds of questions.

Participants welcomed both the infographics and the grading data, recognising the complexity behind both and the need to 'understand the iceberg beneath the water.' Some questions arose with regard to being able to link major to minor award achievement in particular.

Professor Alan Smeaton, Professor of Computing at Dublin City University took consideration of data and evidence on to a different dimension, opening consideration of the scientific possibilities behind learning analytics, and how this might be applied to improve student engagement, behaviours and ultimately the quality of their learning outcomes. Alan drew our attention to our personal digital footprints and how that can inform marketing, sports performance and other activity. Similarly, in an educational context, the digital engagement and mapping of student activity through Wi-Fi tracking, Blackboard, Moodle, library or laboratory use and so on could be argued to yield valuable predictive insight to students regarding the impact of their behaviour on their predictive outcomes in examination or programme participation. In the UK, a pilot project is testing student data, storing it in a single data repository and allowing student access their own participation data vis a vis peers from a smartphone app.

Three major projects are being tested in DCU; Predict ED uses analytics in order to make predictions based on student usage and behaviour in order to predict the students' outcomes. Predictions are fed back to the students enabling them to modify their activities. A second project uses Wi-Fi analysis for finding buddies among students, helping integration and transition. It asks whether an analysis of Wi-Fi

based information about differently formed groups provide information about academic performance? Does the makeup of the group affect performance? Student footprint data from Eduroam was analysed. Finally, Predict Lab is a first year computer programming module where students write programmes, a machine checks if they are correct, with the work then resubmitted as required. This is being used to predict if a student will ultimately experience success. From an ethics perspective these pilot projects required approval from a wide range of authorities including the Research Ethics Committee; considerable care was taken and special advice obtained to protect students and provide for their well-being, for example, data was isolated in particular ways, special non-disclosure agreement were signed, students had opt-out options. None the less the initial findings are encouraging in terms of improved learning performance. Professor Smeaton argued that we needed to be bolder in our use of data analytics to assist students in applying themselves smartly to the opportunities before them and to support their engagement.

For most participants learning analytics was a new concept, and while the theme of early warning signals for 'non completers' and others less likely to experience success were well known, there was a reluctance to consider utilising digital footprints in a VET context; discussion noted the differences in scale and personal engagement in the higher education and VET contexts which might be argued to mitigate the need for such approaches. None the less, within certain skills-based domains electronic feedback is available to learners on performance which could grow and utilise some learning analytics type feedback in time.

Three ETBs volunteered case studies, which examined approaches to data collection and the use of data and feedback, key questions and lessons learnt.

Case Studies

Case Study A: Louise Clarke, CMETB
Data collection and interpretation of self-evaluation in quality assurance, a case study

Context
CMETB has 11 schools, 2 PLC colleges (1900 students), 15 Youthreach centres, a training centre, including contracted training provision, 9 Local training Initiatives (LTI), 2 Specialist Training Providers (STP) centres and has recently started apprenticeship provision, an outdoor education centre and a theatre.

At the end of September 2015 there were a variety sources of data available centrally within CMETB. These included details from QQI Business System (QBS) of validated programmes, certification rates, programme approval committee meeting and from Funding Allocations Requests and Reporting system (FARR).

A range of locally held data from centres has also been collected. These include External Authenticator Reports, details of External Authenticators which have been used and details of leaner appeals per centre.

From September 2015 we set out, as an essential first step, to increase the data that we have centrally and collected a variety of other data including from within PLSS (Programme Learner Support System) and TQAS (Trainer Quality Assurance System). A collection of other documentation, available across the ETB, but not centrally, including centre procedures, training certification, programme proposal committee minutes, were gathered. Steps to improve QA by expanding panels was undertaken, these included a panel of industry representatives, the external evaluation panel and the external authentication panel.

How has this data assisted work on Quality Assurance?
Most of the data gathered has been qualitative in nature. Direct observation has assisted the transfer of the training function from LMETB to CMETB.

The Review of Policy documents has assisted in development of Draft CMETB QA procedures and Self Evaluation documentation for Apprenticeship programmes. Registration data is quantitative in nature and has provided readily accessible information on personnel to assist in the QA process. We have registered people interested in support QA processes including industry advisors, authenticators and evaluators.

We have reporting data – arising from gathering data from centres for input into various systems like PLSS system.

We have commenced interviews with centre staff to establish what works well and what does not.

We carried out a case study in one of our centres and we worked out issues relating to QA.

One of the questions for us is what this data will confirm.

- Gaps in our data
- The diversity in QA procedures between centres
- Some CMETB QA processes are cumbersome – we anticipate that we will gather further data via surveys/interviews as to how they can be improved
- We need to provide greater support to smaller centres around QA and therefore require additional resources at ETB level to do so

Is qualitative data better than quantitative data?
It seems both are required, most of the data to date has been qualitative in nature, which can be a natural point of departure for enquiry. The big challenge is establishing the credibility of findings. We also consider capacity building among staff with regard to skills for interpreting our current and emerging data collection. The time involved in collecting data is considerable and therefore there is a significant cost. There may be time constraints on the choice of method. It seems that we need a blend of centre based and ETB wide data collection. Interpretation of data needs to be carried out at ETB level to ensure consistency in interpretation.

Looking to the future, we are all looking for data for needs anticipation. There is much to be gained from direct observation with European counterparts and there is a need for a training programme to support those using data in quality assurance.

Among the challenges we experience is the question of whether there is consistency in how data is inputted in key systems and the quality control of that input. The existence of diverse IT systems makes it difficult to conduct analysis and the lack of staff with expertise in the area of data management make analysis difficult. Overall there is a need to provide supports in this regard. This is under active consideration as part of our overarching improvement plan.

Case Study B: Alan Hogan, LCETB, presented an analysis entitled 'From data to wisdom – an informed Quality Assurance Practice' based on an analysis of QQI certification data

Context
Limerick Clare ETB (LCETB) has 19,000 full time places, 6,000 part-time places, about 1,000 courses, more than 700 FET staff. It is made up of 35 centres in 300 locations.

This is the description of an exercise undertaken in LCETB around data and data analysis and how data analysis can inform quality assurance processes. Underlying this work is Russell Ackoff's (1999) comment that 'An ounce of information is worth a pound of data, an ounce of knowledge is worth a pound of information, an ounce of understanding is worth a pound of knowledge.'

The data that I found most useful was data supplied by QQI relating to ETB providers and centres. In particular, the centre certification data was very useful. There was such a large volume of data that it was hard to make any sense of it. So we collated that data for examination. We compared the rates of Pass, Merit, Distinction for each centre.

We carried out an analysis to convert this data into information. There is a high range of distinction rates between LCETB centres. Distinction rates varied between 40% and 70% among centres. This is surprising as you would expect the rates to be similar. There was significant disparity in distinction rates from ETB to ETB, also. This is not as wide as that within LCETB, but is still wide. LCETB average is similar to sectoral norms, and these pattern repeat within specific modules.

In attempting to convert this information into knowledge we undertook an LCETB QA Seminar on Ensuring Consistency of Assessment across Multi-Centre Provision. As part of this we set up some Group Exercises to try to establish the reasons for the variations. Among the questions posed were:

- List the factors potentially influencing the range of distinction rates across LCETB centres
- What initiatives could be implemented to improve consistency of assessment across centres?
- List challenges to implementing performance improvement initiatives
- Recommend solutions
- List some other effective indicators to evaluate provision?

We looked at:

- factors influencing the range of distinction rates across LCETB centres
- initiatives that could be implemented to improve consistency of assessment across centres
- challenges and solutions to implementing performance improvement initiatives
- other effective indicators to evaluate provision

Actions
As a result of this we are setting up an LCETB QA Unit with Regional QA Support Officers working more closely with 'people on the ground' with active quality assurance engagement.

We are planning single versions of programme modules across LCETB to reduce the variables between programmes and to introduce additional QA control indicators - percentage EA grade change to be monitored, for example.

Wisdom
Wisdom from applied learning. There are many variables that we are not gathering and we need to collect these. We need to identify critical indicators and contributory factors. For comparison, we need to standardise the variables we use and observe results and modify if necessary. This learning needs to be applied to other programmes and systems.

Conclusion
The analysis of supplied data has provided very useful Information. The Interrogation and review of the information has informed knowledge of contributory factors and potential solutions. Further standardisation of factors and implementing solutions will develop wisdom and reduce risk.

Case Study C: Treasa Brannick Ó'Cillín, CDETB asked 'Are we asking the right questions, in the right way and can we find the right answers?' a case study of data collection and analysis within CDETB

What is the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) doing?

Context

CDETB is made up of 23 Schools and Colleges, 2 Training Centres, 10 Youthreach Centres, 14 Community Training Centres, 17 Local Training Initiatives, an Adult Education Service operating in 5 separate areas across the city through a network of centres. 7 Education Units in Irish Prisons, CDETB also funds the youth services in Dublin City through the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB). This provision is delivered by over 3,000 staff to over 30,000 learners.

Reflections on good practice:

There is no precise definition of quality assurance. Taking QQI's definition we could say: '*at a minimum, a level of service that meets [learner] needs and expectations - so quality assurance is anything that a provider does to ensure that it's learners experience quality*'.

Quality Assurance is also about managing risk, promoting trust and confidence and good will and avoidance of reputational damage. The European Quality Assurance Framework dual objectives for VET are excellence and inclusion.

It is clear that collection of data/information as part of self-evaluation is a key aspect of quality assurance and self-monitoring through guiding questions. For this, it is key that we ask the right questions. It is clear the purpose of collecting data from a quality assurance perspective is to be able to use the information gleaned to improve quality. We need to embed meaningful QA systems into the way we work which reflect the true quality in the system and allow us to extract meaningful feedback to improve our services. We need to look at building review, evaluation and documentation into the way we work in order to ensure improvements are identified and achieved. We could build a 'Ratcheting Affect' with a relentless focus on improvement. There are questions about the role of trust in Quality Assurance - do you have to assure everything? Is anything taken on trust? 'You are the expert; we trust that you are making good to the commitments you have made to the most important person: the learner'.

Documenting carries its own risks. The paper trail might look great but the quality of teaching, learning and meaningful reflective practice may have suffered. Spending time on data collection as part of QA must be worthwhile and meaningful. Therefore, we would have to judge the success of the inquiry on whether it enables us to establish quality exists, protect it and be able to identify area for improvement where necessary.

There are a wide range of data collection systems within CDETB, including Programme Learner Support Service (PLSS); Funding Allocations Request and Reporting System (FARRS), Course Database, Course Calendar, Sales Pulse, the PLC Review Survey to the Department of Education and Skills. The use of public money does require monitoring and tracking to ensure value for money is provided. However, there are issues with data collection systems. These include the complexity of subject matter which may work against accurate recording within a system. Consistency in how the inquiry is framed is problematic as there are differences in objectives and aims for different courses and programmes. There are conflicts between access, inclusion and increased participation in FET and proposals for data collection to capture learner profile for European Social Fund (ESF) Audit requirements.

A significant amount of time is taken up with collecting and inputting data for the collection systems. It is questionable if the data could be used as is to make decisions in relation to quality as it gives a limited picture.

What data? What evidence?
CDETB currently uses data from FARR for cross checking new courses with Approval System for Programme Delivery to ensure all new courses to be offered by centres have been approved by CDETB. FARR Data will be given to Programme Cluster Groups to consider. Many variables impact on retention and learners achieving full certification where it is offered. These issues are also examined at Results and Programme Review Meetings and Results Approval Panels at Centre Level.

There are a number of action research projects in CDETB including:

Programme Approval Systems
Centres must apply for CDETB approval to deliver new courses. As part of the application process centres must engage in market analysis, there must be evidence of clear progression opportunities in HE and/or employment.

The data collected from this project goes towards achieving a greater placement rate for FET graduates by ensuring there are clear pathways into industry where the programme is industry focused and also enhances the status of FET with predefined progression routes, and should go towards lowering the unemployment rate. These goals are in line with EQAVET[1] indicators of quality in FET provision.

What are the challenges, gaps, obstacles?
There is further work required on this in terms of supporting centres engage in good quality research and ensure they are accessing up-to-date data.

What are the recommendations?
One important means of addressing this was identified at the IQAVET seminar, June 2016. John McGrath, Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) based in SOLAS advised that data can be provided by the unit to assist CDETB in this regard. This should improve mechanisms for identifying training needs in the labour market which again is a key goal of the EQAVET framework.

CDETB Staff Programme Cluster Groups
Two Programme Cluster Groups were formed in CDETB this year; in the areas of Tourism and Hospitability and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). These were staff-led collaborative projects supported by the FET Development Unit. Staff will consider data already collected which is relevant to them and also make recommendations as a group.

The aim of the programme clusters is for staff from across CDETB to come together to examine existing provision, share good practice and be briefed on national and local development affecting their area of provision. Staff were briefed on the Expert Group on Future Skills Reports, by Access Officers from Higher Level Institutions and SOLAS on new apprenticeships.

What are the challenges, gaps, obstacles?
Creating the space and time for teachers to come together in the cluster groups as their teaching hours must be covered at centre level. Creating online resources and sharing facilities for staff to work more collaboratively together.

The Groups began in February. Reports from both groups were published in May 2016.
Some key recommendations from the groups are:

- Provide more opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively across the CDETB
- Be more flexible in the choice of awards to meet industry requirements
- Extend the time of work placements

1. Galvao, M.E, VET providers' self-monitoring by using the EQAVET Toolbox of Indicators (A Guide for National Reference Points)
2. www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf

- Develop a data base of employers and develop more focused engagements
- Examine ways of supporting teachers through the sharing of materials and assessment tools
- CDP- Support staff to undertake vender certified courses or work shadowing in industry
- Think corporately about the range and location of programmes

These are staff-led recommendations which go towards meeting nearly all quality indicators of EQAVET with the exception of access and participation by vulnerable groups in FET. The recommendations also go towards meeting the corresponding goals as set out in our national Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019[2].

Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)
To facilitate second chances in education by allowing these learners another opportunity to pursue their potential in the area of STEM; the QQI Special Purpose award Maths for STEM (30 credits) was developed by CDETB in partnership with QQI and HEIs. It is aimed at providing students with an opportunity to develop competencies in mathematics used in STEM degree programmes. This will facilitate progression for FET graduates to such programmes and ensure a greater prospect of success when participating in same.

Subject to legal and regulatory requirements in terms of data, it is built in to the programme that ETBs delivering the programme will consult with the HEIs where the student to progress to; to monitor how Maths for STEM graduates performs on the programme.

The purpose of this is to collect information for improving delivery of the Maths for STEM programme year on year to ensure students are sufficiently mathematically competent for successful participation in third level STEM Degree Programmes.

In terms of EQAVET, the project goes towards ensuring a greater placement of FET graduates in STEM degree courses and also enhances the status of FET. This is an important collaborative project between HE and FET, supported by QQI as the national reference point for EQAVET.

What are the challenges, gaps, obstacles?
There are challenges which must be overcome in terms of sharing information in line with legal and regulatory requirements. There are two possible approaches – feedback from HE Institutions without identifying specific students or reaching agreement with students to allow the more detailed sharing of information on how well the Maths for STEM programme prepared them for their courses.

What are the recommendations?
Forms to be developed for participants where their agreement is obtained for collecting data either directly from them or from the HE Institution or both. Advise students that agreement to participate is voluntary.

Collect data in a general and specific fashion – the latter being subject to agreement by students.

CDETB Adult Education Service: Progress Framework Tracking
The Adult Education Service (AES) has developed a Progress Framework for teachers within the AES. There are four skills that are tracked when working with adult learners. They are divided into Reading and Writing Skills with two levels for each:

Reading	Writing
Skill 1: Read Words, Texts, Signs and Symbols	Skill 3: Write for everyday purposes
Skill 2: Navigate a piece of text, using different strategies	Skill 4: Write to convey information for different purposes & audiences

Each skill is then tracked using the stages of learner progress sheet (see below).

1. The teacher pack includes a learner progress sheet for each skill (4 forms in total). On each form you will notice that there are a range of tasks within a skill. These are grouped according to level.
2. For initial assessment, tutor and student choose a task relevant to the student's needs and goals.
3. The tutor then decides which of the above reading/writing skills suit the task for measurement and chooses a component within that skill. This will determine the level the student is working at.
4. The tutor and student then record the starting point, on the appropriate tracking form, using the four dimensions set out in stages of learner.

Tracking is done at the start, middle and end of the course. The purpose of this tracking system is to track the student's progress and identify if a student is not progressing so the teacher can investigate why this may be occurring. This tracking system recognises the different dimension of learning including the learner's confidence. Self-efficacy is a key component of learning and this is especially true for adults returning to education. It may have been some time since they were in an educational setting.

Data collected is used at the following levels:

- Teacher/Student level. This data is used by teacher to identify areas of difficulty with students but also where they are progressing.
- Adult Literacy Officer/Teacher level. This data is examined for the groups of learners, where issues are identified course level strategies are developed to address them.
- Adult Education Officer/Adult Literacy Officer level. This data is compiled for the service. Service level strategies are developed to address any issues which have been identified and agreed with the CDETB Education Officer.

The work carried out goes towards engaging learners who may be at the greatest distance from the labour market, and often addresses vulnerable groups. This improves participation in FET courses by ensuring less drop outs as students can track their progress and strategies can be developed to address difficulties being encountered. Participants are more likely to complete successfully and move on to the next course level. This also ensures greater participation in FET programmes by vulnerable groups as their learning is being effectively monitored and managing helping them achieve their learning goals and build their confidence for further progression. These are key goals of both the EQAVET Framework and our corresponding national FET Strategy[3].

What are the challenges?
Ensuring teachers have the time to collect the data, along with carrying out their teaching duties. Creating time to get teacher and student feedback on how the progress framework is working.

What are the recommendations?
Liaising with AES to identify if CDETB at corporate level can support this initiative.

3. www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf

Recording the stages of learner progress					
Learning Dimension		1 = New to skill	2 = Getting there	3 = Almost there	4 = Achieved
Knowledge of skill	**K**	New to skill/task	Grasps basics	Improving	Competent
Fluency	**F**	Many hesitations	Some hesitations	Few hesitations	No hesitations
Setting	**S**	Only in session	In other familiar settings	In unfamiliar settings	Pressurised settings
Confidence	**C**	Very uncertain	Somewhat uncertain	Often certain	Mostly certain
Learning Process	**L**	Never manages own learning	Occasionally manages own learning	Usually manages own learning	Always manages own learning
Independence	**I**	Needs a lot of help	Needs some help	Only a little help needed	Needs no help

LINKING NATIONAL PRACTICE TO EQAVET

Indicator Descriptor 1:

The focus of the 2016 programme of work is on self evaluation and feedback loops. Reflecting on these and linking them to the EQAVET framework and indicators we can consider our position:

– Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers

Would you describe your approach to quality assurance as one where:
1. periodic evaluation uses an agreed framework and identifies where improvements can be made
or
2. self-evaluation is rare

CMETB are clearly evaluating available data within their ETB with a view to developing an improvement plan for the use of data and feedback. The views of stakeholders within the ETB are being sought in both the consideration of the relevant data and its use and expansion, and in how to optimise use. This is consistent with the principle of transparency supporting quality improvement.

The LCETB case study clearly shows that there is periodic self-evaluation using an agreed framework, and identifying a range of specific actions and improvements. Continued data gathering is planned. The views of teachers, trainers and those involved in delivery and in the support of delivery are gathered in the first instance and in the ongoing implementation of planned improvements, in a transparent way. This ongoing monitoring is of interest to the service staff, and to the management and leadership team.

Finally, the CDETB case study also clearly shows that there is periodic self-evaluation using an agreed framework, and identifying a range of specific actions and improvements. Continued data gathering is both ongoing and planned, consistent with a wide range of EQAVET indicators. The views of teachers, trainers and those involved in provision and support of delivery are gathered in the first instance and again in the ongoing implementation of planned improvements, in a transparent way.

This ongoing monitoring is of interest to the service staff, and to the management and leadership team.

Analysis of the early experiences of VET providers across Europe in respect of approaches taken to quality assurance based on the EQAVET Framework led to the identification of six interdependent building blocks. These blocks complement the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators.

Importantly, they provide additional practical guidance to VET providers by identifying key activities which can be undertaken to help improve quality assurance processes in cognisance of the EQAVET Framework.

EQAVET BUILDING BLOCKS!

The case studies clearly demonstrate that activities relating to Building Block 05 – Use data and feedback to improve VET – helps VET providers in developing and putting in place supports for a quality assurance approach that is consistent with the EQAVET Framework.

05 Use data and feedback to improve VET	**The relationship of the Building Block to the 4 stages of the EQAVET quality cycle**				**Key questions** *Questions about key factors for success*	**Lessons Learnt** *Suggesting new ways forward*
	Plan	Implement	Evaluate & Assess	Review & Revise		
5. Use data and feedback to improve VET			✔	✔	How can VET providers benefit from using the EQAVET indicators? How can VET providers: - decide what data is relevant? - identify sources and collect data? - analyse the data? - use the data to improve quality	A systematic and consistent approach to collecting, analysing and using data provides a more secure way of making decisions in relation to VET provision. The views of learners, teachers, trainers and employers are essential to improvement. Transparency helps everyone understand what changes are required – this supports quality improvement.
What does the Building Block mean?	**The 'call to action'**					
VET has to meet the needs of both employers and learners. Key to any quality assurance system is the way data on performance is systematically collected and used by VET providers to modify and improve provision.	Is data and feedback analysed and used to improve VET provision? Do the EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors help to identify areas for development?					

WHAT EVIDENCE, WHAT DATA?

WORKSHOPPING TOGETHER: TOWARDS AN EQAVET INSPIRED TOOL TO SUPPORT THINKING ABOUT DATA, USING THE EQAVET FRAMEWORK, BUILDING BLOCK 05: USE DATA AND FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE VET

Each seminar proposed a tool that practitioners might use with colleagues to advance work within their service on the theme of the seminar. This tool is concerned with Evidence and Data.

Introduction: 5 minutes

The Facilitator introduces the session and the objectives, including the EQAVET Framework and building blocks. The workshop is an opportunity for reflection and exploring together what data is relevant in achieving the core objectives of our Quality Assurance Systems. It allows time to begin a process of considering data planning to support self-evaluation and improvement in FET for both individual practitioners and at system level within provision.

This workshop takes approximately 2 hours 10 minutes.

Task 1 *(30 minutes)*

Participants are invited to

- Consider one area of personal interest for self-evaluation and improvement in the FET service that is within your personal scope of influence
- Connect it with possible available sources of data
- Using the table below, consider if the available data is qualitative, quantitative, already in existence or if you need a new source- if so, what might it be?
- Share it with others at your table and consider together if the sources are valid and reliable for your purpose? If not, what could be done?

Please indicate your area of interest: e.g. I would like to understand more about consistency of learner success and outcomes across programmes; I would like to understand more about learner patterns of engagement with different parts of my programme and subsequent performance...

_____

_____

_____

The data...

Qualitative	Quantitative
Exists already	Needs a new source

Task 2 *(30 minutes)*

Every Quality Assurance system supports at its heart the achievement of a range of beliefs and purposes. Different practitioners within the education and training service seek different inputs, outcomes and evidence and therefore data in relation to that goal. For each to reflect on the quality of their work, they will need to consider

- What their community of practice would like the QA system to assure?
- What data might arise from that?

Briefly discuss the examples of data for different practitioners driven by the QA purpose of 'Learner Success' below:

QA PURPOSE
We would like our QA to assure...
LEARNER SUCCESS

WHAT PRACTITIONER?	WHAT DATA? Evidence that...
WHAT PRACTITIONER? Guidance	WHAT DATA? Evidence that... *Prior learning and achievement is considered appropriately, assuring 'right fit' level and course*
WHAT PRACTITIONER? Teach/tutor/trainer/assessor	WHAT DATA? Evidence that... *Learning outcomes are achieved: Quality of evidence Assessment data Assessment briefs, instruments, materials, schedules are understood and implemented Quality of response and performance against standard*
WHAT PRACTITIONER? Assessor	
WHAT PRACTITIONER? Management CE/FET Director/EO/AEO Centre Director QA Officer	WHAT DATA? Evidence that... *Learning outcomes are achieved: Formative feedback and learner response improves learner performance Participation is whole-hearted – attendance, punctuality, time management*
WHAT PRACTITIONER? Learners	WHAT DATA? Evidence that... *Certification evidence is consistent Programme validation recommendations are addressed Accurate programme records are maintained, including legacy programmes*
	WHAT DATA? Evidence that... *Timely feedback on performance was received Feedback on learner's experience of programme and service is responded to Feedback post programme from employers and other providers is responded to*

Task 3 *(45 minutes)*

Using task sheet 3

STEP (I) Start with your core objective for your service or area of responsibility from a Quality Assurance perspective.
STEP (II) Identify which practitioners are involved in delivering aspects of that objective
STEP (III) Identify what data might be required as evidence from that practitioner's perspective, that the objective was achieved.

OUR PURPOSE	
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**
WHAT PRACTITIONER?	**WHAT DATA?**

Task 4 Towards a data plan *(20 minutes)*

The questions below aim to help in thinking about planning to have the right data to inform personal quality assurance concerns and ambitions:

Does your service host such evidence? Yes / No
If so, can you identify where it is located? _____

Do you and the relevant practitioners have access to it? _____

On what basis- individually, in relation to others, in relation to national or international comparisons?

Is the data quantitative or qualitative, or a mix of both? _____

Is the data used already to inform evaluation? _____

Can its use be improved? _____

For which groups? _____

How? _____

What are the benefits and costs of exploring that? _____

Complete the following sentence:

I could improve my use of data in relation to _____

by doing _____

because I would like to know that _____

What data? What evidence? Takeaway Learning

- At national level, the development and roll out of new enriched interoperable data systems are poised to enable more sophisticated data analysis, including for quality assurance purposes across a very wide range of areas of interest
- Practitioners seeking to improve a particular area of practice need to plan the relevant data to support evidence of improvement from the outset
- VET Providers are encouraged to continue engaging with labour market information provided by the SLMRU in planning programme and course provision and in meeting learner needs
- The EQAVET Framework reflected existing quality assurance arrangements used by VET providers nationally
- VET Providers use a wide range of data currently and are in the process of amalgamating data sources and considering how to enable strong communications and sharing of such data for the purposes of improvement planning
- Progress is being made, and management and leadership and practitioner commitment is evident in the approaches outlined and discussions of the day
- Practitioners are keen to handle data responsibly, with understanding and skill
- Practitioners and their discussions of provider approaches to quality assurance strongly reflected commitment to service improvement, not to data or self-evaluation as ends in themselves.
- Do we need to think beyond our current technologies including towards learning analytics?

SEMINAR 2: SELF EVALUATION

THE SECOND SEMINAR PROPOSED BY QA PRACTITIONERS NATIONALLY WAS ON SELF-EVALUATION

This was for two main reasons. In the first instance, both the EQAVET work programme and that of the NRP focus on self-evaluation and on building a culture of reflection and continuous improvement of quality. Secondly, Irish VET providers are embarking on a cycle of formal self-evaluation leading to re-engagement with QQI on the basis of new quality assurance policies. The synergy with national concerns and the international agenda made this theme of natural concern in order to support the NRP.

Alan Hogan, Clare O Neill, Steven Lavery, Margaret Gilroy, Joseph Ryan, Xenia Papadema, Andreas Georgoudis, Andrina Wafer

The second IQAVET seminar took place in November on the theme of self-evaluation, and was chaired by Alan Hogan of Limerick Clare ETB, a member of the IQAVET Steering Group. The seminar aimed to provide an opportunity to consider self-evaluation including in the context of case studies of others from different sectors and jurisdictions whose past experience might reflect elements relevant to current challenges. Case studies from national practice within the ETB sector would also be presented. As set out in the original work plan, a draft toolkit would be tested, providing a template around which to frame discussion on self-evaluation in the context of QA; an opportunity would also be availed of to consider a draft template under consideration for the voluntary sector in preparing self-evaluation reports against QQI criteria, for the purposes of Provider Access to the Initial Validation of Programmes leading to QQI awards, and Stage 1 Self Evaluation of Capacity and QA Procedures.

Dr Bryan Maguire, Director of Quality Assurance, QQI opened the Seminar, and briefly set the national context for self-evaluation for all providers seeking to engage with QQI. Within QQI policy quality assurance is a providers own responsibility, and hence self-evaluation and improvement planning is a core expression of that ownership. Within the Guidelines, self-evaluation is required to be conducted formally at specified intervals in a broad, systemic way, typically informed by routine self-monitoring activities and reports. It leads to a Self-Evaluation Report and is always improvement plan oriented. This is common across European and other quality assurance systems also. The national process for Self-Evaluation Reports (SER) with ETBs provided for a strong fully externally oriented SER by 2019, which will embed EQAVET principles but be fully provider owned and driven.

Andrina Wafer then linked this to the EQAVET Framework and the quality cycle, and to the focus on self-evaluation in the EQAVET work programme. The nuance proposed by the guidance community nationally, that quality assurance be evidence informed rather than purely evidence based, was appreciated by participants in their consideration of evidence within a culture of quality assurance and monitoring. Differences in function were noted between monitoring and self-evaluation, with self-evaluation seeking to provide an evidence base for *why* performance is where it is with regard to targets, not *where* it is at in terms of current performance. The EQAVET indicators provide key universal measures carefully negotiated and agreed across Europe for quality in VET provision. In addition, considering building a shared culture of QA, EQAVET recommends core principals, for example, that self-evaluation is provider owned, goal and context specific, end user oriented, with a communication plan in-built so as to inform stakeholders of its conduct and ultimately provider performance; discussion of a positive 'failure culture' is strange perhaps in an Irish cultural context, it was proposed that the idea of failing on the path to improvement is something we might usefully consider. The EQAVET work focus is evidence-based and outcomes-oriented with support for continuous improvement; it aligns to principles of access and equity, responsiveness to labour market need, support for evaluation and quality improvement cultures, particularly early warning systems for retention, preventing drop outs.

Alan Hogan, LCETB - EQAVET+ Working Group Meeting, June 2016 - Update

The EQAVET+ Working Group was established in June 2016 to provide practical guidance on implementing the indicative descriptors of EQAVET+, reflecting Member State priorities

EQAVET+ indicators were agreed at the Network meeting in Haarlem in June, relating to 7 new areas complementing the EQAVET Recommendation, and including Work based Learning

The 7 priorities:

- Apprenticeship, work based learning provision and in company training
- The processes of defining, describing and assessing learning outcomes
- Qualifications design, assessment and certification
- The pedagogical processes associated with learning outcomes
- The teachers' and trainers' role in the quality assurance process
- Procedures which are used in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with EQF/NFQs
- Planning and improving the review phase of the quality assurance cycle

Each will have indicative criteria at system and provider level; there are two types of indicative descriptors in EQAVET+ - five completely new indicative descriptors- two at system level, and three at provider level. Eleven add information to existing indicative descriptors.

The Working Group will address the two types of EQAVET+ indicative descriptors differently. This calls for three kinds of tasks: Type a) indicative descriptors will produce case studies. Type b) indicative descriptors will have existing case studies updated and reviewed to address new elements. All NRPs will have the opportunity to update, change replace or delete any of the existing case studies.

The new case studies are context-rich and framed so as to capture active problem solving situations, challenges and enablers. They consider the priority areas identified by the Network on Complementing EQAVET. LCETB have volunteered to submit a case study, on the quality criteria, 'Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles'; it will illustrate that VET providers use valid accurate reliable methods to assess individuals' learning outcomes.

The Working Group will present its results at the Annual Network Meeting in June 2017.

Peer Learning Activity Dubrovnik, July 2016, Marie Gould

Irish delegates Vinny McGroary, David Treacy, and Fionnuala Anderson at the PLA and the QA of Work Based Learning

The EQAVET Network at EU level enables participation in a range of peer learning activities, some of which are facilitated by EQAVET experts. An invitation issued from the Croatian NRP to send nominees to a PLA on the theme of the Quality Assurance of Work-Based Learning and Self-Assessment of VET Providers. Participants presented on approaches to quality assurance of work based learning. One of the questions for discussion at the PLA was around the training needs of employers in conducting assessment and in the provision of a learning and working environment, and how this liaison might be best

achieved. Participants from five ETBs attended along with a representative each from ETBI and QQI. Key learning occurred as much in the informal debate and exchange of views as in the formal participation and exchange over the two-day seminar.

Dr Fionnuala Anderson of DDLETB informed by discussion with Irish colleagues presented on some of the challenges in an Irish context around this topic, such as balancing employers needs and objectives with those of learners, programmes and lifelong learning objectives, the scale and scope of employer activities, affecting the experiences available to those in training, the challenges where economic recovery outpaces the austerity measures impacting on public sector provision and the fundamental concern of how nimble can FET really be, yet retain strength in quality? It was felt that some of the models shared were useful particularly opportunities for industry placements for teachers. Defining clear outcomes for work based learning and training of mentors and assessors in workplace contexts was challenging for many countries and systems.

Andrina Wafer of QQI presented again in consultation with ETB colleagues, on the national approach to self-evaluation locating it in our shared perspective of the useful contribution of the EQAVET indicators, but acknowledging the careful deliberation by the ETBS on how best to approach self-evaluation at institutional/ETB level. Of those participating in the PLA, all countries represented used self-assessment in some way, half had a national strategy and three-quarters published outcomes of self-assessment in some way and felt that it was important to do so. Many shared a nervousness about the use of self-assessment and the purposes to which it might be put. The extent of development of systems, guidelines and processes varied. Drawing employers and learners from outside of formal provision into this dialogue and engagement with networks was seen as valuable in driving the agenda forward.

Marie also updated on the **ETBI QA Strategic Work Plan**, and a focus with milestones under discussion including in the areas of assessment, the implementation of new validation policy and developmental supports, and in the context of today's seminar, a proposal for an Executive self-evaluation Process for 2017. Such a proposal would provide for an executive led self-evaluation process with agreed common indicators and criteria, with an external facilitator working with ETB management teams. This work would lead to an improvement plan that would provide a basis for dialogue within each ETB and ultimately with QQI.

Blue Sky Thinking was led by **Alan Hogan, LCETB**, with participants invited to share what they thought self-evaluation was and what they hoped for from the work of self-evaluation. Feedback from small group discussion work is summarised:

- *Self-evaluation should be affirmative of what we committed to doing, identifying areas where we are doing well, but also where we hope we can improve; it should provide recognition of areas of success, with concrete examples*
- *It should give us a clear picture of risks we face- it's not just a paper exercise- it should be a real pathway to improvement*
- *Self-evaluation should be inward thinking but outward projecting*
- *It's about reflective practice; it uses tools. Are we delivering a good experience to our learners? Are we using tools for learners to allow us reflect and change to create a better experience for learners?*
- *It's a good stocktaking of our Quality Assurance processes. It should act to minimize risk. Self-evaluation is an improvement process, are programmes successful? Are programmes improving? How are stakeholders experiencing them?*

- *It should be criterion referenced, it should be targeted and planned, we should know where to focus our efforts and create benchmarks so that we can grow from here.*
- *How can we ensure that our self-evaluation is meaningful? Money and accountability for value for money spent counts. We have to have plans and evidence. Self-evaluation is a good way to ensure that people get what they want.*
- *Self-evaluation should propose models of best practice for learners.*

Three models of Self Evaluation were presented, a national case study from the Institute of Technology sector, by Dr Joseph Ryan, and two from outside the Republic of Ireland, one from Northern Ireland and one from Scotland, both focusing on Colleges who have experience of amalgamation and therefore integration of multiple quality assurance systems, including beliefs and orientation behind them.

Finola Butler, Mary Sheehy and Miriam O Donoghue of the Further Education Support Service

Dr Joseph Ryan, Quality Self Evaluation

Dr Ryan set the broad context first at national level, identifying the National Skills Strategy, the Action Plan for Education and the fundamental shifts reflected in legislation as reflecting a broad philosophical shift at policy level. The focus nationally now, he argued, is on breaking cycles of disadvantage and on providing sustainable jobs. Higher education and further education both have critical roles to play in these key tasks, working also with enterprise and other agencies. Higher education has some 215,000 participants and further education and training 230,000 - with a focus on economic sustainability, personal development and fulfilment. In that context the diversity of people that ETBS and publicly funded VET serve is more diverse than that of the higher education sector, so the task in quality assurance is perhaps greater, observed Dr Ryan.

A number of key observations were made:

Delegates discuss self-evaluation and quality assurance

The journey for ETBs is similar to that of IOTs, formerly RTCs, but possibly on a larger scale because of the complexity and diversity of the services. It reflects a **cultural change** at corporate level to systemic self-evaluation, from effectively a federal approach.

In approaching self-evaluation, it is key to **consider the audience**. One of the audiences for this self-evaluation is QQI. It is important to consider what audiences will think of you and of your service. The public are also an important audience- you want them to have confidence in what you do and to value it. We are accountable. We must maintain confidence in our awards, our standards, our system. Our staff and students are a big part of our stakeholders.

Bologna and European Standards and Guidelines are core to so much of the discussions in education and training- mobility is at the very heart. Massification is another concept that is also central to the current changes we deal with. There are however four essential principles in the European Standards and Guidelines that govern higher education.

1. The first is that **institutions have primary responsibility for their own quality assurance**. If we agree that that is essential, then we are confident about the core of what self-evaluation is all about.
2. The second observation is that **self-evaluation is an opportunity**. Open every press, expose everything, share it- get advice from a panel of experts on how to make things better.
3. Culture takes time to change. **Communication** is vital. It is never important- until it is important to the person who is hearing the message. Communication with staff is vital.

4. **Self-evaluation takes time and needs planning**. If I were to lead my Institute towards a self-evaluation for 2020, I would be starting now. Here are my key questions:
    - What is the Institution trying to do?
    - How is the Institution trying to do it?
    - How does the Institution know it works?
    - How does the Institution change in order to improve?

Dr Ryan gave practical advice to the network participants: "You need to engage as many people as you can. Start with a **tight working group**. Do not include the head of the Institution. Choose analytical people. Process is key. What you are doing today and on days like these is key. Talking to people, **working in the context of your own strategic objectives**.

John Moriarty of Ballyfermot College of Further Education share VET practices with Xenia and Andreas of the Cypriot NRP

You need benchmarks. Aim for a report that is 20-25 pages long. Present a sharp self-critique. Be honest- panels who come are sympathetic and helpful. Demonstrate that you have done analysis particularly of strengths and weaknesses.

Go back to your data conference in June. You must have an evidence base for your conclusions. Pre-plan. Surveys with employers, staff, students take time. You need people with the capacity to analyse your data. This will give you an informed external evaluation from which you can prioritise and base a strong discussion on remedies needed and how to enhance your performance. Networking and sharing is key to all of this.

Xenia and Treasa, with learners and teachers of the Ballymun Youthreach centre, CDETB, share thoughts on effective VET practices

Having a QA network is useful to move forward together. Use your sector and the supports you have together to move along in the process with each other. You will find it brings you farther than you dreamed."

Margaret Gilroy, Assistant Principal, Access and Continuing Learning, Glasgow Clyde College

Margaret presented on the experiences and learning in conducting self-evaluation in Glasgow Clyde College, building on a presentation by a former colleague, Thomas Smith, at a QQI Enhancement Seminar, Self-Evaluation and Reflective Practice (please see www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/FE%20Enhancement%20seminar%202016.aspx). Glasgow Clyde College had experienced amalgamation and subsequent development and renewal of quality assurance processes, including for self-evaluation.

The IQAVET Steering Group had posed several questions for Margaret to answer:

- How do Glasgow Clyde College make change in terms of self-evaluation?
- How does the College make the benefits of self-evaluation meaningful?
- How are staff and stakeholders persuaded?
- Who is identified to be persuaded or influenced in particular?
- How does the College use data in self-evaluation in ways that are simple and useful?

Building support for Self-Evaluation

Margaret explained that Glasgow Clyde College is a merged college, one of three former colleges. 'One of the things that we continually get wrong is our name amongst ourselves and this can give offence, particularly as it was a matter of considerable debate and decision through a committee system prior to amalgamation. Getting the name wrong can alienate people, and this impacts on the potential to persuade. We have learned to take care with the things that matter to colleagues and stakeholders.'

Margaret explained aspects of the process leading to amalgamation. Prior to amalgamation, all committees had lecturing staff and support staff participating, but no Principals from any of the colleges as a part of any committee. This ensured that everyone was engaged in which truly, nobody wanted to engage. The paperwork of the 3 colleges was reviewed. This was an important signal of respect for the tradition of each college. The paperwork for the merged college was agreed. Fired up by that, we merged and had a celebration in Glasgow.

A clear timetable for self-evaluation in the new college was also agreed. Everyone knew the date by which the paperwork would be submitted, and understood the process around its evaluation, including relevant performance indicators. Some performance indicators were determined by the teams, and others were determined by the development plan for the college. We were clear about purpose of the process and cycle of self-evaluation.

The self-evaluation process was implemented using a variety of communication strategies because of co-location across diverse campus's. ICT was optimised. All-staff meetings were held in each campus alongside smaller team meetings. Communications efforts were comprehensive, with purposeful reports, leading to action and improvement plans based on feedback from staff. This was key to persuading people in engage in self-evaluation. There is a direct visible link to what staff tell you, leading to an action, linked to an action at a higher level in the organisation. Funding is an important factor. If staff want something done, evidence is sought from self-evaluation reports, providing a business case for funding. That is visibly helpful. This has been effective to some degree.

Examining assumptions and challenges

A lot of assumptions were made in defining and implementing quality assurance within the amalgamated entity, and these have had to be re-examined. The quality assurance team *thought* that everyone had a common language because self-evaluation has been around in Scotland a long time and that there was surely an agreed language – but, explained Margaret, we found that staff didn't, and the language used did not mean the same thing in each former college at all.

We *thought* that everyone valued self-evaluation, because the Committees did, and the paper work suggested they did- but they didn't! The experience in a small unit in a small college was different than feeding in from a small unit to a bigger, merged college.

We *thought* everyone understood the purpose of self-evaluation, but some people viewed it as a management tool that was somehow 'out to get them'. That was unfortunate, but for some people it was a real concern. A lot of time was invested persuading people that this was not true. However, in a change management situation, it is difficult to persuade people that somebody is not out to get them when some of the people being persuaded *are* going to lose their job or have a different title or have less power than they used to have.

We assumed that everyone was in it as a whole-college approach and not a management led initiative.

We assumed that students were at the centre of the process. We did student surveys in the first few months, then in March and when they left. We are awash with student surveys. That does not mean that students are at the centre of the process.

An additional challenge is that there can be a sense for some staff that self-evaluation takes away from the student process because it takes time away from directly working with and for students.

Margaret then addressed how the college are building on the learning from examining assumptions and challenges.

Improvements in communications and relationships across the college have become evident. The Quality team are going back again and listening to staff. There is greater evidence of a common language and understanding. People are more comfortable with each other.

Paperwork has been adjusted to better meet staff needs in the task of self-evaluation. Self-evaluation and quality assurance is not about the paperwork, it is about the learning from each other and the changes that we want to make based on that, but always based on evidence.

Evidence bases are being strengthened. The evidence base is arguably the most important thing about self-evaluation and improvement planning which is not then based for example on a story about student X who is having a dreadful time. That may be true but evidence must be shown why that student should be treated differently.

Staff engagement methods continue to develop and to be diverse. The QA team have fewer all-staff events because it was found that such events do not give people the opportunity to talk in depth. More targeted work with smaller groups of staff with specific opportunity and focused challenge of engagement in self-evaluation has proven more effective. Staff have demonstrated themselves to be the most influential people engaging with external stakeholders and with students. Our experience is that when engagement with the staff is right, other things seem to be taken care of. They engage with employers. As a college, we are all keen to engage with government department because we seek funding. We engage with local councils on the basis of single-outcome agreements and we demonstrate our effectiveness against these agreements. The QA team work hard to show staff that the positive impact of self-evaluation is win-win. The more staff engage in reflection, the more what is done as a result works for the student and the greater the job satisfaction for everyone.

Reflection, self-evaluation and data have led change, including difficult change. There are courses that have been dropped. There are areas where there are no longer jobs for some of the staff, where they have had to re-train or be re-deployed or accept redundancy. These are difficult things to do but when it is based on self-evaluation and evidence from local market indicators, people understand why there is less work. There is not a sense of being attacked or got at. We can put support in place. In terms of self-evaluation, it is about understanding where we are going, how we are going to get there, and what are the options for us all.

We are also trying to future proof the paperwork, take account of policy drivers and medium-term change that is anticipated from both external and internal institutional perspectives, so that documents can be stabilised for a five-year period. This gives staff comfort.

A sample guide to self-evaluation is included in Appendix 1. Lecturing staff were once known as academic staff, but that language became unhelpful to us. Other staff are support staff. The self-evaluation pack for lecturing staff is different because they are expected to know what they are talking about and are given very specific performance indicators at different times of the year where those indicators are important to the college. These can be compared nationally so that performance and achievement can be benchmarked. The Quality team and staff meet and evaluate our performance for example with regard re recruitment targets and adjust actions accordingly. Language used for support staff is different in accordance with different responsibilities.

As a college we are interested student retention and non-completion and the reasons for it. About 6% of students leave us before we get funding. In some areas it is as much as 11%. We have a lot of excluded people in Glasgow and there are barriers. We know this anecdotally, but we can't see the

barriers; we need to see what we are doing in terms of our self-evaluation to reduce those barriers and increase retention. We look at what the students are telling us because we have that evidence. We also look at everything else, very deliberately in order to develop an evidence base for an action that everyone can support.

Our focus is consistent with yours and with EQAVET- research, planning action and evaluation, always on an evidence base.

Steven Lavery, Head of Care and Access, Northern Regional College presented the third model of self-evaluation, one which focussed on quality improvement planning. Northern Regional College has also experienced amalgamation and integration of quality assurance services and systems now in operation over five dispersed campuses', and has very kindly offered to host a study visit from the IQAVET network in 2017.

Steven explained that early Self Evaluation Reviews (SERs) were really annual course reviews which have subsequently developed into a broader self-evaluation process, based on an overarching strategy of the Educational and Training Directorate. It is known as 'Improving Quality and Raising Standards' or IQ:RS. The key objectives of the strategy are to develop and embed a culture of self-improvement that will ensure all providers of further education and work-based learning are responsive fully to the needs of learners, employers and the wider community and that they commit to and achieve continuous self-improvement and excellence. It also aims to assist in the development of clear and coherent systems of support to ensure that inspection findings are addressed effectively and efficiently, that innovative and good practice is identified and shared, and that strong and innovative leadership and management is developed at all levels of the further education and work based learning systems.

As part of our College process we work up a number of SERs. The SER therefore helps to plan, monitor and review what is happening within the College, department and team. An SER directly leads to a Quality Improvement Plan. Both are integrated. All the completed SERs and the Quality Improvement (QI) Plans help inform the Whole College SER and QI planning process. Self-evaluation is really about the team- it asks- with learners' perspectives at the heart of the matter - what does the team do?

What impact has the team's actions had on learners? What has gone well i.e. what are our strengths? What has not gone well- what are the areas for improvement? Strengths must have evidence to support them for example, course data, student or employer school feedback, individual learning programme feedback, team meeting minutes, Inspectorate reports. We have invested significantly in our ability to carry out self-evaluation, for example in developing our language skill in the use of evaluative words, such as 'outstanding' or inadequate' or modest'. We have worked on the challenges of standardising our common understanding of rating scales, grades 1 (outstanding) to 6, (poor) - is my '2' grade really your '3'?

We also try to involve everyone in the SER process, across five campuses, whether full time or part time staff. Part-time staff don't have the same buy-in to come to meetings. It is challenging to get input from everyone. We are exploiting technology so as to allow multiple people to update the document at the same time.

The SER is important to Northern Regional College as an organisation as it has a key role in driving what the College does. Steven then outlined the practicalities of approaching the SER: 'We start with the team SER; we do it by programme level. All the people who are teaching on the same course at the same level input into the same SER. It could be Childcare Level 1 or Childcare Level 2. That informs the next tier. There are then Heads of Section, they do their SER based on the teams inside their section. I do my SER as Head of Department. All those SERs feed into the whole college SER. This document ultimately runs to 40 or 45 pages, collated from all the SERs, distilled to focus on the main strategic priorities of the college. The SER process doesn't stand without the associated Quality Improvement Plan, which is the logical accompanying document. In developing the SER, teams are drawing out strengths but also areas of improvement. These go into the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and that is

what drives quality forward. Course teams always have improvement plans on meeting agenda. They meet 2 - 3 times over a term, and will routinely include an analysis of progress against the QIP, whether they are going to bring in guest visits or go on educational trips or how progress will be driven forward against targets so as to bring about the desired improvement.

The Quality Improvement Plan is the most important part of the documentation. It sets out priorities that are clear, and actions that are SMART (*Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic Time-related*), with clearly assigned responsibilities. We have found that people can struggle with setting targets, but I would caution around using percentages. Here is an example of a QIP:

No	Objective / Target	Actions	Evidence Objective / Target / action has been achieved	Key Staff Responsible	Timescale
1	Improve whole course retention by 10%	Obtain regular learner feedback regarding the programme	Learner unit/module feedback requested for 75% of units/modules Learner feedback requested for 100% of educational visits and guest speakers	All team members	1st Oct 1st Feb
		Enhance learner tracking sheets	Learner tracking updated once per week for 100% of learners	All team members	1st Nov
		Review course data at each team meeting	Course data reviewed at 100% of team meetings with actions put in place to address concerns	All team members	Every team meeting
		Reread Retention Strategy	Minutes of 1 team meeting highlight discussion of Retention Strategy	All team members	1st Nov

A completed SER including QIP, with strategic targets, has about 40 pages.

We have an inspection system that has expanded beyond what happens in the classroom. The role of the Inspectorate has grown and they take a close interest in the strategy, providers have benchmarks, the Inspectorate do sectoral benchmarks, by subject, by level, part-time and so on. They will ask the same questions of different stakeholders to check for inconsistencies which are then reflected in the report.

The Inspectorate come in February every year and do a 'scrutiny inspection'. They look at the various SERs, in order to triangulate evidence. They talk to staff, to students, to managers, to all stakeholder's involved. They give a confidence rating about whether or not they are confident that you have the internal ability to analyse what you do and to make recommendations for improvement if that is what you need to do. Consistency matters and learning to triangulate across the diversity of provision is important for us.

There are some challenges that we have faced that may be helpful to think about:

Buy in
Trying to get people to see that the process is worthwhile and delivers value for everyone.

Evidence needs to be gathered during the year
Teams need lead time- a minimum of twelve months' data; evidence needs consideration and advance planning. One of the items we provide is an analysis of all course data. We provide three years' course trend data: retention, achievement and success, with commentary and insights. For example, if only 50% of the students complete, that requires explanation and commentary. It does not require any particular analytical skills necessarily. Mechanisms need to be in place for storing agreed evidence, and for gathering and considering it.

Timing (of the SER completion)
August is productive within our system. Improvement needs to be planned for implementation in September.

People take acceptance of own responsibilities
SER and QIPs are not a management bashing or whinging exercise. It is really about programme management.

Standardisation of grading, developing a shared language and understanding and how you communicate that, is a challenge and takes time. In education and training, is 'satisfactory' good enough? Do you need at minimum to be 'good' to maintain public confidence?

Culture change
Following the plan (QIP) getting people into the way of thinking about the quality improvement programme throughout the year. Establishing and bedding in a programme takes time.

NATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Two case studies were presented orally rather than as written submissions, examining approaches to evaluation, some key questions and lessons learnt. These are summarised below.

Case Study A: Self Evaluation: Evaluating Training Programmes, FAS /SOLAS / ETBs, Des Murphy

Des Murphy shared from the perspective of the Operational Manager within the Training Centre tradition, and as someone used to concepts of accountability, largely in the tradition of Donald L Kirkpatrick. Training is viewed by the State, employer and paying student as an investment, all of whom have different expectations of tangible benefits from the programme and of the training provider in terms of evaluation of value for money for a service procured. The provider of the service may have different issues to raise in evaluation. Self-evaluation therefore has to consider audience and accountability.

Providers, such as training providers will face issues such as selection and recruitment of appropriate candidates for training programmes leading to direct employment opportunities, the scheduling times for programmes aligned to employment opportunities, selection of appropriate facilities and the impression that creates and nature of participation it invites, the selection and preparation of training aids etc. A particular issue can be the evaluation of behavioural change which can take time to emerge, frequently after the completion of the programme, and thus may elude evaluation in the immediate time frame available to the provider of the programme, yet may have a causal relationship with the investment of the programme.

Evaluation of reaction of 'customers' within programmes is important, only if it is acted upon. Every course ends with an evaluation sheet. How often these are acted upon or are subject to serious reflection may be a matter for discussion. If appropriate action is to be taken, care must be taken with feedback.

Within the training system self-evaluation requires reflection on the following elements

- Determination of needs
- Setting of objectives
- Determination of subject content
- Selection of participants
- Determining the programme schedule
- Selection of the appropriate facilities
- Selection of the appropriate teacher of instructor
- Selection and preparation of training aids
- Co-ordination of the programme and
- Evaluation of the programme

In addition, the quality of learning must be addressed, answering questions such as whether learners attitudes changed, knowledge or skills were increased? Did behaviours change - can change be tracked over time with the distance travelled across the duration of the programme noted? Results of the programmes are noted in terms of tangible benefits, observed changes in learner behaviour, measurable outcomes, certification achieved, progression or employment outcomes, and if there are actions that the course provider can take with regard to any of these outcomes, these must be identified and noted.

Case Study B: Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, Seeking a role for self-evaluation in the journey we are on, Clodagh Beare

> **"It's in all those dialogues, it's in these conversations, in agonising over cups of coffee that we find our shared values, that's where we realise we have a common vision. All that feeds up to management level where we can develop an ETB-wide analysis of results of self-evaluation, identification of development needs and championing of an ETB-wide culture of quality."**

Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB was created in 2013 through the amalgamation of 3 organisations, County Dublin VEC, Dún Laoghaire VEC, and 3 training centres from the former national training and employment agency. There are eleven Youthreach centres, within Further Education and Training, nine adult education services, five post-leaving certificate colleges, and nine dual-provision schools as well as three training centres. Our current challenges, in common with other ETBs, include management of four different Quality Assurance Agreements with QQI, different strengths in the QA processes, different cultures. Clodagh observed that amalgamation can be signed into being with the sweep of a pen but the process of integration is slow. Working towards re-engagement with QQI, and embarking on self-evaluation at ETB level we have a process can be a catalyst to discover what we have in common. It could assist us unpick our perceptions and give us real space to work towards a common culture, with common values and a common identity. The position of the Quality Assurance Officer is one of privilege because there is insight and oversight of all the diversity of systems and realisation of the commonality and shared commitments across a service.

There are strong traditions of self-evaluation already established across different parts of the service. At a previous QQI event, we considered the Youthreach Quality Framework. We also have service/centre self-evaluation models, and programme self-evaluation and monitoring systems. The EQAVET cycle is useful at systemic level and maps that cycle that every course has, planning, teaching and assessment, with internal verification, external authentication, results approval processes, and evaluation and review separate from programme improvement. We have rich data, consistent with each stage of the EQAVET quality cycle.

Community Education has a particularly rich quality assurance cycle of reflection and self-evaluation, and is yet outside the accreditation space frequently. It is a useful example of how the evaluation of how well we are doing what we do is central to the purpose of what and how we do it, intrinsically rather than instrumentally. Engagement is with the community of learners, deeply so in the planning stage; cycles of continuous feedback, adjustment and improvement are central to delivery. Future iterations of courses are improved with care. For the particular group that has been engaged with, future needs are identified and if courses can be provided to meet the need, these are planned and provided. There is feedback from learners, tutors, and from the community group and organisers. Where the course is accredited, all the usual mechanisms for feedback apply. The vision is wholly that quality is not the prerogative of accredited provision, but that all learners deserve it.

Service/centre self-evaluation takes place in post-leaving certificate centres, typically cyclically. A co-ordinator is appointed for the self-evaluation to drive the process, as is an External Evaluator. Former learners are surveyed for feedback although this has proven challenging to source. Programme staff are surveyed. Qualitative interviews are held with the Department Heads. Current learners are surveyed. Data are used to complete a checklist. A Programme Evaluation Report is drawn up, which is reviewed by the External Evaluator, and a Programme Improvement Plan is developed in conjunction with management. This is widely acknowledged as a very rich process.

A challenge going forward however is to take that learning and to convert it into a common discourse, to integrate the learning across all the service. Can we develop a common culture and path across all our services so that there is a shared quality experience for staff and learners alike?

The EQAVET statement on quality assurance and self-assessment goes to the heart of the matter: 'before there can be engagement with quality assurance, there needs to be a shared understanding of quality in the system and at provider level, and agreement on what it means in different contexts and systems. This understanding is best developed within the context of VET provision rather than being externally defined by, for example the inspection methodology. As it can be hard to measure some of the most important characteristics of high-quality VET, it is important to develop this shared understanding of what really matters. This can also help to ensure quality assurance is undertaken at every level within the VET provider. '

The vision of the quality office in DDLETB is one where the self-evaluation system puts the consideration of quality and not quality assurance at the centre of the process, because learners and their service deserve the most robust protection we can give them, so that they get the best that we can give. It should be based on iterative reflective dialogues and feedback loops, where learners, teachers and other stakeholders have an awareness of their role in contributing to a culture of quality and feed into the self-evaluation process. Centres should have their own evaluation of self-evaluation data and work to develop their own culture around quality. There should also be service level reflection on the results of self-evaluation and the promotion of a culture of quality within the service. At ETB level, we need an ETB wide analysis of the results of self-evaluation, the identification of development needs and the championing of a common ETB wide culture of quality.

Sean Feerick presented at the QQI Enhancement Seminar on Self Evaluation in April and identified that within the EQAVET Framework that self-assessment as part of QA for VET providers was about:

1. Learning organisations and learning individuals
2. Needs reflection at all levels, not just at school level
3. Being an integral part of the everyday life of schools
4. There should be continuous discussion about QA and what it comprises
5. Developing a shared understanding of quality
6. The involvement of stakeholders
7. Implementation of self-assessment at all levels
8. The 'right' balance between development and control
9. EQAVET can be used at a framework that encourages self-assessment and autonomy of VET providers

Our experience to date is that amalgamation has taken us time but has given us also such richness. Self-evaluation for us is an opportunity and a tool to identify and share our strengths and to develop our common language and commitment to quality, not just to quality assurance.

Develop a culture of self-assessment

It is clear that national concerns, reflected in case studies both of training centres and their self-evaluation processes and in the case study on self-evaluation presented by DDLETB, seek, in line with the RIGA Conclusions, to 'further develop QA mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET, and to establish continuous information and feedback loops.'

Furthermore, the focus on integrated provision-wide transparent discussion and the shared understanding of quality concerns within services and through the IQAVET and other networks and associations, underpins the 'introduction of systematic approaches and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in school settings' (primarily in this instance) with a specific focus on quality and quality assurance. For many practitioners this would not have been part of initial or pre-service training and is a relatively new formal dimension of professional practice.

The DDLETB Case Study in its in-depth presentation (view: www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Clodagh%20Beare%20DDLETB_IQAVET_Nov%2016.pdf) is explicitly aligned to the EQAVET quality cycle.

Walter Balfe, Head of Provider Approval, QQI, outlined a process being prepared for new providers that is currently in consultation, with a view to garnering feedback but also to seeing if it offered possibilities for a model of self-evaluation against criteria within the QQI Quality Assurance Policy and Guidelines. Walter explained the context that the new validation policy involves a self-evaluation report with improvement plan as part of the programme submission process, and that a mapping of criteria to guidelines template document was under consideration as a potentially helpful tool. It follows the structure and referencing of the guidelines; for each guideline, a provider is asked to verify, that the guideline has been addressed, and to indicate to a potential panel evaluating the providers' policies, which quality assurance policy is relevant in support of this. A second template addresses validation, and a similar one might be used for other QA approval processes, for example, in re-engagement. Walter stressed that the templates, while draft did not attempt to substitute criteria, or to reduce reduce consideration of the overall context of the provider's environment or system.

Walter also spoke about the panels engagement in validation, approval and in responding to self-evaluation reports. QQI had begun to mix sectors and particularly practitioners from further and higher education and training in panel groups so as to enrich consideration, but also to expose both sectors to the other's concerns and insights. Having led on panels, Walters offered the perspective that self-evaluation should be useful for those engaging in the process, and that it should strive to be helpful. The use of data, evidence and benchmarks was invaluable, bringing in peers to assist in setting targets, agreeing targets and strategies for example for completion rates, is very useful. Walter also commended the network and others like it in terms of providing rich communities of practice on which to draw.

Having demonstrated the draft templates, the response of participants was broadly positive, noting the breadth of criteria to be considered in particular.

Workshop Report

Participants at the Seminar then engaged in a workshop, testing our second toolkit. The tool was designed to support self-evaluation, based on a SWOT analysis. The discussion of the tool identified that the questions themselves were helpful, but that some redesign would allow more space for example, for answers. Two ETB representatives, Nuala Glanton, Cork ETB and Angela Higgins from KWETB, volunteered to refine the tool. In principle, SWOT analysis looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were felt to be part of a helpful suite of tools in self-evaluation.

Further discussion focused on how ETBs might manage the strategic executive led self-evaluation and how that might relate to the externally oriented self-evaluation planned for 2019, and how one would relate to the other.

WORKSHOPPING TOGETHER: SELF-EVALUATION

Introduction: 5 minutes

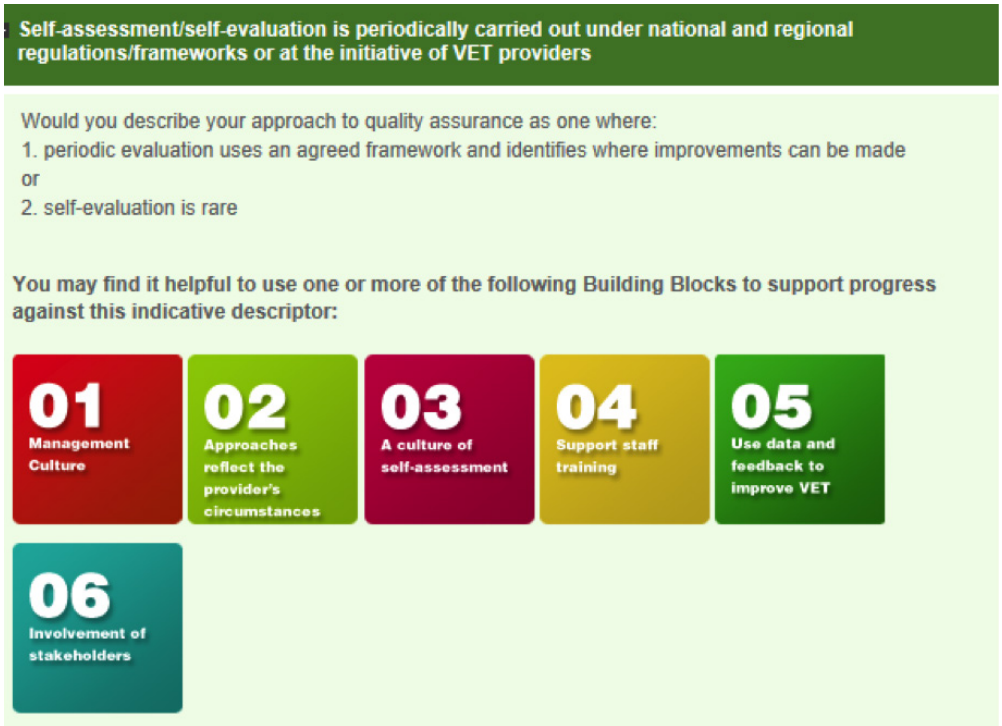
The Facilitator introduces the session and the objectives, including EQAVET indicative descriptors on evaluation, and the workshop as an introductory opportunity to reflect and explore together some issues and approaches to self-evaluation. Self-evaluation goes beyond monitoring- it's not just at where you are at with regard to your aims and plans, but tries to find out why you are where you are.

Objective of session:	To support thinking on self-evaluation informed by an EQAVET lens, testing a 'tool' To build familiarity with EQAVET indicative descriptors
What does EQAVET aim to do?	Support an evaluation and quality improvement culture
Why?	To promote mutual trust, mobility, permeability in and across VET provision
How?	Tp strengthen governance across Europe, nationally, regionally, locally, sectorially, systemically
What do you need?	To use this tool, you may find it useful to 'BYOD' - Bring your own device' so that you can access the EQAVET website during the exercise. The exercise is two hours' duration approximately.

Task 1 *(20 minutes)*

Link: www.eqavet.eu/qc/tns/building-your-system/evaluation/descriptors-list.aspx

In plenary, discuss the indicative descriptors on evaluation. Underneath each of the following questions are two contrasting statements, in each case which is more true for your service?



Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction

Would you describe your approach to quality assurance as one where:

1. evaluation and review takes account of a full range of views including learners' satisfaction and staff performance

or

2. evaluation and review only considers a limited range of views and processes

You may find it helpful to use one or more of the following Building Blocks to support progress against this indicative descriptor:

Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders

Would you describe your approach to quality assurance as one where:

1. the views of internal and external stakeholders are reflected

or

2. the evaluation and review focuses mainly on the VET provider's perspective

You may find it helpful to use one or more of the following Building Blocks to support progress against this indicative descriptor:

Early warning systems are implemented

Would you describe your approach to quality assurance as one where:

1. the VET provider has systems in place to predict problems or issues

or

2. the VET provider does not identify problems or issues at an early stage

You may find it helpful to use one or more of the following Building Blocks to support progress against this indicative descriptor:

Task 2 *Large Sheet (1 hour)*

The following are important questions to consider in planning self-evaluation. Discussion is in small groups *(30 minutes)* with feedback to the plenary *(30 minutes)*.

Analysing the context Who is the primary end user? Who are your three main internal stakeholder groups?	
Identifying goals/objectives State a main objective or priority for the VET provider to self evaluate against:	
Selecting EQAVET indicators Is there an EQAVET indicator that helps with this focus? Do you have a data source for that indicator at your disposal?	
Related inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes Can you list inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes related to the area your evaluation will focus on? These will be sources for your self evaluation.	
Converting implementation effort into evidence based reports and actions taken What evidence is generated at provider/centre/ classroom/workshop level that is relevant to your focus? Do strategies change at local or other levels as a result of evidence collected and can you demonstrate this?	

Task 3 *SWOT analysis (15 minutes)*

Based on the plenary discussion and your own analysis, in small groups, consider your services strengths, weaknesses opportunies and threats with regard to completing a self evaluation report in your chosen timeframe. Keep it tight- no more than two observations per frame.

IQAVET TOOLKIT		
	S	**W**
	O	**T**

Task 4 *Data planning (10 minutes)*

In order to prepare for self-evaluation reflection and reporting, some data planning is needed. What do you think your primary source of evidence will be?

IQAVET TOOLKIT	
	DATA What data? What evidence?
	ACTION I will...

Task 5 *Call to action (5 minutes)*

Your personal response- what will you do to prepare for self evaluation? Will you look more closely at an EQAVET indicator? Case study? Some local data? Set up a meeting with some colleagues to see if others share a particular concern that you have? Check out your stated commitments regarding a particular programme of work? Note it down!

My concern in self-evaluation is:		
IQAVET TOOLKIT	**S**	**W**
	O	**T**
DATA What data? What evidence?		
ACTION I will...		

Takeaway Learning

- Self-evaluation and the associated improvement plan is a natural by-product of a provider owned quality assurance process
- Self-evaluation is evidence informed and requires detailed planning, whole organisation commitment, communications and planning, in line with EQAVET Framework Building Blocks
- The context for self-evaluation is the organisations own strategic vision, mission, goals, beliefs, objectives
- Self-evaluation is an honest, helpful self-critique that can deliver tangible positive change and outcomes for staff, learners and other stakeholders; communications and building internal commitment and common understandings and language regarding quality and self-evaluation takes effort
- For quality to be systemic, quality assurance is undertaken at every level within the VET provider's system - and yet the focus is on quality, not quality assurance
- Self-evaluation leading to re-engagement is an opportunity for us to build a common culture, a common set of values and a common identity
- Self-evaluation is not naïve; it recognises multiple audiences, and the need to be accountable, to contribute to national policy objectives and to maintain public confidence where it is deserved, including in the capacity to regulate, re-engineer and improve.

SEMINAR 3: GOVERNANCE

The third seminar proposed by QA practitioners nationally took place in December 2016 and examined Governance. This was largely in response to the strategic decision of ETBs to focus on institutional governance as a first step in the road to re-engagement with QQI on the basis of new QA policies. The topic of governance is of interest across many sectors in VET because of the diversity of provision which is frequently 'mixed' with the result that all providers must give this significant consideration.

Andrina Wafer, Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha, Marie Gould, Niamh Lenehan, Alan Hogan, Martha Bolger at the EQAVET Forum, December 2016

The seminar was chaired by Siobhan Magee, Further Education Support Service, a member of the IQAVET Steering Group. The seminar aimed to provide an opportunity to consider governance from diverse perspectives, including from other sectors, for example the health sector, and in the light of EQAVET principles. Based on feedback from the previous seminars, the Steering Group reduced the number of speakers and gave more time to exploration and discussion, particularly with regard to the EQAVET web resources.

Dr Bryan Maguire, Director of Quality Assurance in QQI, opened the seminar, noting the appointment of the FET Directors and the important infrastructural developments within ETBs as key, though not the only, providers of publicly-funded VET. Bryan observed that many strong developments were coming to fruition finally, including with regard to governance, partly due to levels of dissatisfaction with the nature of governance that was in place for predecessor organisations. In some instances, the current suite of legislation appeared to be framed more to counterbalance historical practices and arrangements. Oversight and poor decision-making came into very sharp focus for particular periods of time in the overarching context of recession. Recent legislation and structures are a chance to put in place better linkages between levels of governance enabling a really strongly quality assured education and training system that is sustainable and that delivers at the coalface.

QQI has a role, but it is not the central role. Schools and school systems have their own governance mandates, while ETBs and SOLAS have different requirements. QQI issues quality assurance guidelines, providers establish quality assurance procedures locally that have regard to the guidelines, and then implement the procedures. QQI subsequently monitor and review the effectiveness of the procedures. QQI's decision to lead with comprehensive common guidelines is a signal of parity of esteem and an indication that provider led responsibility has common features regardless of sector and specific context.

The QQI Guidelines lead off with governance: there is a system in place to oversee the education and training, research and related activity of the provider to ensure quality. The governance structure enforces separation of responsibilities between those who produce or develop material, and those who approve it. Included in the governance structure are groups or units who make decisions and those who approve them.

In good governance, there is a clarity of distinction between the different roles and different parts of the organisation, different layers and levels. Some of the key decisions to be made at ETB level include how are they appropriately divided, what happens at centre level, at board level, in between, at shared national level, collaboratively between ETBs, co-ordinated by e.g. ETBI, or for other sectors, how, and whom, is this common to all ETBs, all VET providers? Apprenticeships, for example, are national programmes, and bring with them different systems of governances.

Andrina Wafer, EQAVET NRP and Head of Access and Lifelong Learning QQI, then introduced governance in the context of EQAVET and data.

When the NRP team researcher, Dr Clare O Neill was researching the topic, an article uncovered by Antje Barabash seemed to capture some of our characteristics and journey so very well:

> *"The dynamics of power relations on a global, regional and local level are reflected in governance structures as well as in the design of policies. Studying these configurations in the field of VET shows us that there is no universal trend towards a world society but instead there is* ***a manifold patchwork of multiple governance arrangements*** *that interchange structures and context policy transfers, adapt to new circumstances although mostly rather slowly, and are* ***occasionally overthrown in times of massive social and political change****. Nevertheless, certain tendencies described by Mayer and his colleagues can be described in examining VET governance. If we distinguish between global, regional and local discourses in policy agendas in education then* ***a shift towards more accountability, standardisation, full-time VET, or even more so vocationalisation of higher education, increasing flexibility and transparency between various educational strands, as well as the implementation of modern technology****, can be observed on a global, but also on a European level."*

Alan and Martha reflect on issues at the EQAVET Forum

Recapping previous work, Andrina reminded the Network that we had looked to EQAVET as a possible system, as a framework and asked how it worked from a governance perspective. We committed in this cycle of work to the theme of continuous improvement, to promoting and monitoring for continuous improvement. We know we all want our services and performance to be better, we want better outcomes for our learners, a little bit better each time. We look to the indicative descriptors. Are we nationally, doing the right things- and doing them right? Do we have effective arrangements? EQAVET also gives us specific indicators with which to measure and consider progress and performance. Most are measured through the work of SOLAS and PLSS and other data systems that are now in place nationally, and to which you have increasing access. Indicators that measure performance nationally, against which you can benchmark your service and ultimately against which we will be able to compare internationally also. There are indicators then that measure performance, at both provider and system level, nationally and internationally. There are case studies and individual building blocks, which we have looked at briefly previously.

How does EQAVET itself operate in terms of governance? It is part of what is known as the 'open method of co-operation', a 'soft power' across Europe. Governed by Recommendation that Member States agree to implement, we share practice and inspire each other through example to better practice in VET, acknowledging our different contexts and priorities at national level. It is tacitly supported. 'Soft co-ordination' enables a mediation of country systems, and grows trust.

In terms of governance, for example, the Commission and Member States together are considering if the Recommendation is still 'fit for purpose', whether it needs revision, new annexes to bring it up to date, to address new challenges. If so, what impact would new elements have on older elements and so on? Do the Riga Conclusions still stand? While we may feel that we are working so hard to implement and meet current or imminent EU targets

Leadership at the EQAVET Forum reflect on progress – Sean, Arancha and Joao in discussion

Alan, Clodagh and Miriam share thoughts at the Self-evaluation seminar

for VET, Ministers are looking beyond 2020, ensuring that our political instruments will enable us as a Community to position VET alongside industry and enterprise so that there is an appropriate flow of skilled and work-ready people who also are lifelong learners, equipped for sustainable participation in competitive knowledge economies. Upskilling Pathways is a new initiative targeting adults with low levels of skills and qualifications, and it is proposed as part of a potential new common VET policy across the EU. The IQAVET Steering Group went to the EQAVET Annual Forum and really enjoyed the VET week presentations about new directions in Europe, the debates and open questions. Nationally work to implement the FET Strategy- planning for the new Strategy will surely commence shortly, and quality assurance practitioners are part of the thinking. Where do we want VET to be in 2020 and beyond? Where do you want your service to be? What part does quality play in that? EQAVET uses governance as an instrument for policy transfer. Our work here helps us take EU policies and transfer and translate them into our national and your regional contexts. We are connected, we participate.

EQAVET prizes 'horizontal co-operation'- working with stakeholders, social partners, communities, enterprises. This is the bread and butter of ETBs. EQAVET has also taken on some new work in the area of mobility for learners, a key value in Europe, and important nationally.

However - while EQAVET is deeply embedded in democratically accountable governance systems across European instruments, the range of tools, indicators, descriptors, building blocks and so on do not explicitly reference governance, with the exception of a new item on apprenticeship. The building blocks reference management culture, ensuring a management culture committed to quality assurance, using data and feedback, ensuring VET is based on the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, all of which were referenced in our earlier seminars. Yet, so often when we talk of 'management culture' with practitioners, people talk about being alienated, with so much happening, that they feel as if they are not part of decisions any more; in fact, some argue that governance gets in the way of their making decisions.

Roisin Sweeny, QQI, takes Croatian NRP delegates through the QQI awards system

A series of resource articles in your packs refers to 'paying attention to the category of human or social factor in policy transfer' and this was also discussed at the Self-evaluation seminar, how to give practitioners time to engage and share issues and concerns for quality, not just quality assurance. Another referred to governance as a 'constellation of actors and factors, systems, cultures and instruments'- acknowledging that the magnetic impacts of one adjustment in a system on its other parts. All resource articles are published (view: www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Further%20Reading%20VET%20Governance.pdf) with many useful perspectives on governance: 'when governance is strong and effective, data is skilfully used, problems are well defined, data informs and is not just published but is clustered'. 'When governance is acknowledged as strong and effective, policy is built through a process of consultation and consensus building with a wide range of stakeholders and is subject itself to this governance.' QQI attempts to model aspects of such governance as do providers. It is interesting linking this to our EQAVET relationship across Europe with our NRP counterparts elsewhere and consider the impact if any, at national level.

Martha Bolger, FET Director, KCETB, IQAVET Steering Group led a Blue Skies session on governance. Martha examined some formal definitions of governance, including UNESCO who define governance as 'the structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability,

Croatian NRP delegates experience a warm welcome at DDLETB Youthreach centre, Tallaght

transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment and broad-based participation'. Nuttal's dictionary refers to 'direction, control, management', while the World Book set it out in terms of 'government, rule, control'. Project governance is defined as 'those aspects of governance which are related to ensuring the effectiveness of projects. In essence, project governance is about helping to ensure that the right projects are done well.'

Martha observed at the EQAVET Forum, an inspirational quote where leadership was defined as 'doing the right things and management was doing them right'. She argued that marrying that concept with that of the UK project governance might give us a working definition for governance: 'doing the right things and doing them well'.

The question was asked then, what governs us as we do our daily work? The Code of Practice of the Education and Training Boards provides a framework for the application of best practice in corporate governance, within ETBs. It concerns both internal practices and external relations with the government and the Minister for Education and Skills, for Finance, for Public Expenditure and Reform and their respective departments.

In terms of quality assurance, much concerns accountability to learners, managers, Directors, CEs. Tutors are accountable also, and can feel conflicted between doing the right thing as they perceive it for learners and for centres. All of this we are used to, argued Martha, in a system of governance where objectives are aligned with mission and strategy, the QA system is owned by the provider. A system of governance that protects the integrity of academic processes and standards, a system of governance that considers risk, and a system of governance that considers the results of internal and external evaluation. The action plan, customised and adaptable, is the primary deliverable of the governance process. Martha proposed that any plan would answer the following questions:

- What are the key governance goals and objectives for the current project, or indeed any project?
- What are the expected results and anticipated benefits?
- Who are our stakeholders and what are their roles and responsibilities?
- What are the established governance procedures to be followed and used?
- Why is each procedure necessary and how will it contribute to the project's success? How will the governance plan be maintained, reviewed and up-dated? How can we ensure that governance is live, not a shelf document but contributing to that ongoing dialogue about our daily governance?

Croatian guests against a backdrop painted by Youthreach participants in DDLETB

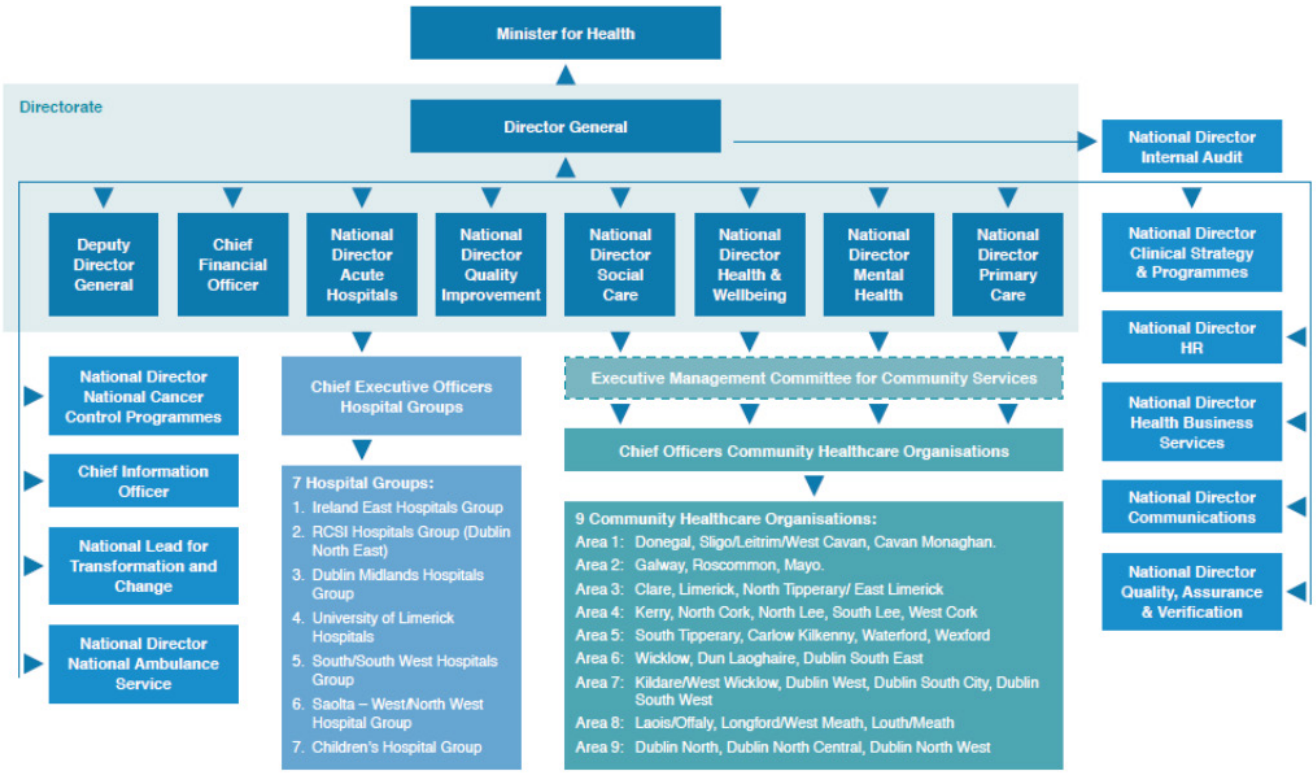
Features then of the Wheel Governance Code, which sets out elements of governance in a user friendly way for community, voluntary and charitable organisations talks of making sure that vision, purpose and values remain relevant, developing, resourcing monitoring and evaluating a plan to make sure that our organisation achieves its stated purpose, being transparent and accountable, identifying those stakeholders who are legitimately interested in our work and making sure that we communicate with them regularly and effectively. Signing up to the code means that we commit to the standards of these principles and that performance will be reviewed against it annually.

For governance to work, argued Martha, everyone is responsible for it and accountable to it.

Irene O Byrne Maguire, Clinical Risk Advisor of the State Claims Agency, gave an overview of the principles of appropriate governance and the Health and Social Care sector; Irene focused on the governance links and the commonality that was evident across sectors, particularly when national remits and codes are examined.

In introducing herself and her broad context, Irene explained that she worked for the Indemnifier. HIQA regulates and the HSE provides health care services, but many voluntary and statutory agencies also supplying services. European policy and leadership also is important in health, perhaps from a different perspective - recognising the democratic bulge, an aging population and planning so that we age positively and healthily, maintaining independence and low risk for as long as is possible.

In explaining governance in the Health sector, Irene reflected on the power of relationship. Using the organisational chart, Irene observed that 'if governance isn't about relationship, what is governance about?' Later she explained that relationship was also a method of operating, of enabling things to be achieved. The structure reflects the priorities and the vision of what is actually the most important goal to be achieved.



Within relationships, Irene explained, there are clear roles and responsibilities- people, processes, plant and equipment, place and product. There may be very different service providers, different contexts, but fundamentally, all share these characteristics. There is an accountability framework which involves the Departments of Education and Skills, Public Expenditure and Reform, Health and Finance. There are tightly defined resources and budgets. Measuring, monitoring and evaluation are critical parts of the way work is done. Service plans help shape progress, and put actions, people and power behind the vision, values and mission of the organisation. It is hard to hold alignment. Our greatest ally is our service user; our patients are vocal and that is helpful.

Speaking from the heart, Irene observed: "We have found high level goals, so that people who are delivering services at the coalface can find their heart and space and place and deliver, often against the odds. We promote health and wellbeing, provide fair, equitable and timely access, foster a culture that is compassionate honest, transparent and accountable, engage, develop and value our workforce, build capacity and capability, and finally manage our resources in a way that delivers best value. My own role is with regard to older persons and people with disabilities.

Governance is the part of our work that helps us to mitigate risk; it enables stakeholders to have their best interests accounted for. I would like to see us move to a view of stakeholders as partners, where the focus is on collaboration, co-production, co-design. I believe you can do similarly with learners as partners. Vision, values and mission can only get legs and feet though us doing it, there is no other way. It's about self-leadership, respectful relationships, innovative practices, underpinned by a person centred approach."

Three national case studies were presented looking at evolving models of Governance in ETBs. Two were presented orally and also as written submissions, and one as an oral presentation only.

Case Study A: (Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board) Damien Walshe, Quality Assurance Officer

What is KCETB doing?
The process of validating former SOLAS programmes into the KCETB is currently on-going. As it stands, numerous amounts of major awards at Levels 3, 4 and 5 have been validated. By doing this, each ETB is inheriting the assessment instrument specifications that accompany this validation. This raises a possible opportunity to strengthen the integration between the further education and training programmes that are on-going throughout KCETB.

There is a very structured Quality Assurance system that maps assessment delivery, internal verification, external authentication, assessment documentation etc. A pilot approach is currently being carried out with regards to introducing some of these processes, in particular, the AIS pack structure into some of the further education centres.

What data? What evidence?
The data came from gathering opinions/ thoughts from interested centres and tutors as to the positive and negative aspects of this integration. It was found that a number of tutors were extremely interested in piloting this system with a specific focus being placed on how this structured presentation of assessment material would aid new tutors in getting to a level of comfort and confidence in their role.

Questions raised
A number of briefing sessions have been held with representatives from our further education centres within KCETB. These briefing sessions outlined the structure of the assessment packs, how they are best delivered and presented for external authentication and the processes involved as these were the questions that were initially raised in meetings.

Factors explored / to be explored
One major factor is identifying how the structure and modular content can be integrated and suited for part-time provision, night classes etc. Also, a body of work will have to be carried out nationally or at ETB level in updated assessment content or integrating tutor content into assessment packs to ensure that the most up-to-date information is being used.

What are the challenges, gaps, obstacles?
There are many challenges that will present themselves in this project going forward such as changes in the structure of delivery for tutors, marking sheets, marking rubric systems etc. However, the initial idea is to pilot the modules being carried out in specific centres in specific modules to try and figure out if the structure of the assessments is worthwhile. The updating of the assessment content is a separate issue that is also currently being looked at nationally by ETBI.

How has work/thinking on governance assisted work on Quality Assurance?
The overall aim is to create a balanced medium between the assessment structures that AIS packs present to tutors/learners and also, allowing the tutors delivering in further education to continue with their own autonomy and input. If this were to be successful, it would present strengthened governance and one overall system in relation to assessment delivery, documentation and standardization within KCETB.

Recommendations / Outcomes/ Next Steps / Additional Comments
The next step in the process is to complete the information sessions being carried out in the identified further education centres, to record the modular content needed and develop a monitoring system over the course of the pilot module in order to determine the overall success of the system. Once one module has been piloted, the tutors will be given the opportunity for feedback, this information will be correlated and a decision as to continuation and expansion of this process across further centres will be discussed.

In addition to this, KCETB are currently undergoing the approval process to become a recognised City and Guilds centre. This added option for certification will also benefit some vocational areas and provide specific qualifications for those in a niche area.

Case Study B: Governance and QA in KWETB: changing systems, Angela Higgins, Education Development Officer, KWETB

The back-story: Legislative change; Two VECs; Further Education, Training; Common Awards System; Quality Assuring Assessment; Programme Development, Delivery and Review...

With complex change came the realisation of the need to maintain services, while at the same time embracing change.

There were immediate pressures which lead to the evolution of the current system in KWETB, including:

- **Learner results** – robust systems in place BUT... Further Education Vs Training. Necessity drove development: to ensure that certification would continue to be issued during transitions. **Responsibility/Sign-off:** Education Development Officer (EDO) (Further Education)/ Adult Education Officer (AEO)(Training)
- **'Programme development'** (production/development of materials) linked to 'area-based' Programme Planning. **Responsibility/Sign-off:** Area-based Coordinators and Principals – AEOs - SMT
- Driven by FET planning and linked to decision-making
- A number of awarding bodies
- Market-led rather than strategic – 'Is it out there?''Does it meet my needs?''Can I manipulate it to meet my needs?''Where can I find it'?

- Functional rather than 'Blue Skies'
- Developments based on availability of other funding (e.g. Dormant Accounts), and some special projects
- A plethora of validated programmes – ETBI National development process; QA58s; KWETB Validated programmes.
- Planning timelines influenced by timeframes for inputting courses into Programme and Learner Support System (**PLSS**).
- **Further Education** – Single point of contact for information about what is available/what is possible/ what can be adapted and used now.
- **Changes and innovation based on absolute need** – little room/space/resourcing for innovation/in-depth development. Culturally, planning is not linked to timeframes associated with development of new initiatives. R&D is a luxury.
- **Self-evaluation** – FE – analysis of External Authenticator(EA)and Internal Verification(IV) reports; Appeals and Awards (and lately of Programme Database) to identify areas for improvement. Change in IV reporting to gather data on Student Support policies. Training sector operated differently. **Responsibility/sign-off:** EDO/AEOs

The System: What we do now (Some of the solutions)
Support Structure for Quality Assurance in Further Education – 1.5 people
- SharePoint platforms for Further Education – QA Site and Community of Practice
- On-line submission of estimates (5 times per year)
- External Authenticator Panel – from recruitment to payment
- Area-based/central Results Approval
- Management of Appeals

**Provider and centre ownership of quality and distributed responsibility is really important.*

Continuous Professional Development : Collaboration for Good Practice and Problem Solving
Developing a positive culture of quality in the organisation, based on innovative delivery, analysis of assessment and certification data and issues arising - Centred on the FE sector at the moment.
WHY?

- Telling stories - the narrative, and celebration of achievement
- Learning from one another
- Dissemination of good practice
- Information updates
- Presenting challenging issues/outcomes for discussion following reviews in an open and safe environment - no wrongs - just room for improvement/development.

What data? What evidence?
Quantitative and Qualitative
- New data sources – Programme and Learner Databases
- Changing what we know - we know more about the whole organisation and participants
- Number of courses; Number of awards; location of awards delivered - challenges - highlights levels of equity and inequity
- Qualitative data informs provision of CPD and Programme Review (EA/IV/Appeals)
- QQI Awards Data reviews
- Potential for comparative analysis

Questions raised
Factors to be explored
- Where does curriculum development rest or sit? Who should be responsible for this? Who takes responsibility for programme development (not standard development)?
- Is a single, simple integrated system within large organisations like ETBs desirable/feasible?
- Where, and how, will Quality Assurance link with wider elements of ETB governance – HR; Corporate Services Governance and Finance; Buildings….?

- How might we create a system where all personnel involved understand and come to know it well?
- What is the most effective way to achieve knowledge transfer in this area?
- How might we create an environment where there is understanding of the role of governance as a mechanism for relieving pressure and enabling rather imposing more pressure?

What are the challenges gaps/ obstacles?

- Quality Assurance "Gap": perceived gap between central or senior management/governance and management of Quality Assurance (Really? Or just imagined?)
- Communications cascades - dependent on plethora of different groupings slowly moving to shared identity – alignment is a challenge – mission, strategy, services…
- Challenge of hierarchies
- Challenge building cyclical approaches which include scoping and development of projects

How has work/ thinking on governance assisted work on QA?

- Focus shifting to quality as a value
- Quality Assurance as a mechanism to support the achievement of greater quality
- Quality Assurance – new paradigms for administration built on equity - administrative functions need to be clear and unambiguous in order to contribute to, and support an education and training service that makes the best offer to learners; employers and society.
- Linking of functions is important – crosscutting teams doing work defined by clearly understood strategy/mission
- FE QA Strategy: Driving principles behind QA System: Deming's Quality Cycle and Peter Senge's Five Disciplines (Personal Mastery; Mental Models/understanding; Building Shared Vision; Team Learning; Systems Thinking).
- Lightbulb moments:
- Signing documents that state that the learner has achieved a national standard is a significant statement to other stakeholders with legal connotations and consequences
- Based on this – each element of the jigsaw is important and cannot be excluded
- Corporate identity –clearly stated and robust policy and procedures enhance the brand and identity of the organisation

Areas of governance that are tangible (FE):

- Management of programme versions
- Communication to Managers and Principals
- Programme Development and Approval
- Internal Verification; External Authentication; Staff Development
- Bespoke and general improvement plans
- Planned strategic approach to CPD
- Staff Recruitment (managed through existing HR processes, but not related to programme requirements)
- Facilities - in some cases managed, but in other cases, ad hoc approach has caused issues
- Reporting to the ETB: How much does the ETB know?
- Two weekly reporting to AEOs a norm for all provision except PLC. PLC Principals report to Director of Schools.

Areas of governance that are tangible (Training):

- Distribution of assessment materials and programmes from centrally held archive
- Internal Verification Process - labour intensive
- Little trust in professional integrity of assessors/ focus on standard and consistency through control
- Control is important
- 'Off the shelf' assessments and 'off the shelf' programmes.
- Inherited FAS/Solas systems

- Planning closely linked to needs identified through DSP protocols
- Tendering and procurement processes applied to selection of contractors –robust procurement procedures
- Apprenticeship - driven by national approaches to QA
- At local level -governance applies to supporting learners

Recommendations and thoughts

- Scope for national supports to ensure integrity and neutrality - External Authentication; Validation of Programmes (QQI); Curriculum Development; Evaluators' panel; Self-evaluation or monitoring team for sector at national level/inspection team.
- WHO drives integration of governance and quality into strategic plans?
- Need for clear scoping and planning of goals and tasks - there is a sense of thinking 'what you have, you hold' - holding on to the equivalent of household clutter
- Lack of 'blue skies' thinking - allowing time to imagine what might be
- IT competence - leadership of this depends on capacity or humility or both of leaders concerned
- Barriers between administration/knowledge of education and training/how people learn/ curriculum development and design vs organisation of the processes. The hierarchical system is problematic,
- TRUST is important - but for trust to exist there must be honesty - the data is revealing stuff that can no longer be hidden, but we need to perceive it as an opportunity rather than a reason for feeling shame.

Case Study C: Governance and QA in LCETB, Alan Hogan, Quality Assurance Officer, Steering Group Member

Alan outlined how LCETB approached developing a QA infrastructure following amalgamation, particularly facing such diversities in scale and scope of providers. There was awareness of what needed to be done, a separation of functions, with management of risk and self-monitoring, that was completely our own responsibility. We built a Quality Assurance Unit and a Research and Development Unit, with a steering group who meet approximately two to three times per year. Each working group has formal terms of reference, and keeps formal records and can escalate issues as appropriate. Within the QA Unit, members have specific roles and responsibilities, and are accountable against those. People support the structure. Within each working group, people support governance, and that is the core message. Governance needs people resources. For a map of the structures please view the presentation
www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Presentation%20Alan%20Hogan%20LCETB.pdf

The QA Steering Group task is to review the overall strategic direction of QA assurance, governance, systems, self-evaluation and monitoring and to oversee results approval panels. The ultimate strategy is to have three formal regions, one for County Clare, one for Limerick City and the other for County Limerick each with an implementation group. The Implementation Groups will manage communications, inform centres and staff, update on activities, developments set priorities, manage queries, disseminate policies, promote cross-centre QA and other initiatives in order to promote an integrated and coherent approach to quality.

LINKING NATIONAL PRACTICE TO EQAVET

EQAVET speaks of a framework where there is a management culture that is committed to quality assurance. This means that central to the implementation of the EQAVET Framework is a culture which supports and values quality assurance. In each of these case studies, the management teams value quality assurance. Managers are involved in ensuring high quality VET and are taking responsibility for quality assurance. Leadership is being explicitly provided and is collaborative with staff and other stakeholders. Approaches reflect the provider's circumstances.

Actions are clearly linked to national policy priorities and will support genuine engagement with quality concerns.

Participants were then invited to discuss in small groups responses to the ideas and concepts raised with a view to raising issues for discussion with Irene as Keynote speaker. The following ideas were proposed:

- The diversity of approaches being taken by ETBs in the whole area of QA and governance and the disparity in terms of resourcing. Is there a need for a coherent sectoral approach nationally?
- Having the capacity to be proactive rather than reactive, and to have the appropriate structures and staffing to enable that; suffering system envy of higher education institutions with delegated powers to make their own decisions, feeling the barriers of too many layers in decision making
- The 'Hoarding element' in ETB life- learning to share information, to be transparent
- Governance being representative of people, people being the enabler of governance- you can't have governance without the appropriate enabler of the right people
- ICT needs. If sectorially a coherent system was designed, would it be possible to equally plan the approximate overall support systems that are needed to enable it to run effectively? A systematic development framework that allows staff learn to use the technical information and tools to enable us do this well?
- How do we keep the learner at the centre of everything? As in the presentation by Irene- how can we co-construct quality with learners? How do you put the learner voice at the heart of what we are servicing?
- Bringing the 'Bulls to the table' - health has used social partners, patients and service users as allies for better outcomes; how to enable such co-construction in VET?
- How do we keep the focus on the end and ensure that our tools and structures remain just enablers and tools and not ends in themselves?
- Relationships, dialogues- these are time-consuming, particularly if the QA office is one person
- Maintaining the dynamic- how do we keep good practice ongoing within six cycles per year, while putting new structures in place and maintain the legacy! What is the role of governance in a time of change, in bringing about and supporting change, when the governance structures themselves are also changing- if there is no anchor point?

Irene was invited by Bryan to respond to some of these questions in a panel interview.

She began with the question of governance versus management, not being swamped by bureaucracy and discussed this in the context of 'self-leadership' as part of professional identity. The emphasis is on self-leadership so that management is not linked only with hierarchy; in some traditions particularly in healthcare, the space you have, you hold and anchor and moving to even integrated 'halls' that are holistically oriented rather than specialist oriented is a big step, but moving to a focus on health outcomes- not unlike learning outcomes- can be of great benefit.

Part of the system has to take responsibility and deal with the concept of 'Who is to blame?' Doctors felt frequently that they were to blame, but the indemnity scheme that the State Claims Office runs is for enterprise liability, so that the organisation is protected provided the HIQA standards and codes are observed. National Clinical Effectiveness Guidelines are developed then which are multi-disciplinary to cover other aspects.

The idea that in education 'at least, nobody dies' was discussed- but Bryan pointed out there are very clear correlations between mortality rates and educational attainment, it is just that the link is not immediately apparent or causal. Governance as a concept is important precisely because if can deal with long term chronic problems as a distinguishing characteristic from day to day management. Governance is about ensuring that urgent problems do not overwhelm those that are truly important.

Governance opened doors to healthy, respectful and inclusive conversations that allowed all voices to have a stake. It was proposed that governance may be the very thing that may protect and enable

your learner's voices within the system. When difficulties emerge, the health sector has referred to international guidelines and found ourselves in the development of particular checklists as reference tools to processes; these include whether the whole teams were talking to each other and had consulted. This makes processes more collectively owned. The communication strategy is also important in this - in Health Care we found we needed an E-help strategy.

In discussing diversity versus coherence of approach within ETBs as opposed to as a single sectoral approach, questions raised in the panel conversation identified value in both approaches. Bryan proposed that the debate might be something that would inform the response to the sectoral guidelines. Views from the floor indicated that it might be difficult to know the same quality of standard across the services as a whole can be provided unless there is some standardisation of the governance structures and of the QA structures; equally that these structures being new, meant that people didn't know what to expect or how to separate what these Boards or Councils might do versus what more operationally oriented ones might do- in Irene's phrase, how to bring the 'bull to the table', how to shift the contractual and administrative contracts for example. In responding, Bryan noted that in higher education the conventions are not so specific, but do acknowledge proportionality of time or staff in relation to management or learners or other stakeholders that are part of decision making structures.

WORKSHOPPING TOGETHER

As in other seminars, this seminar also proposed a 'tool' that might be helpful in raising the concepts of the seminar with colleagues in the service, but also that linked some of the key concepts to the wealth of resources available in the EQAVET Framework. Our focus is to support a quality and improvement culture generally with a specific focus on governance.

At EU level, the governance of VET is a key part of the persuasion behind arguments for mobility and permeability for VET qualifications, and for employees. The persuasion of member states is achieved through strengthened governance and transparency measures locally, regionally, nationally, sectorially and systemically. Permeability and mobility for VET in Ireland is about progression for VET learners into employment and from VET into higher education. Interesting questions arose in discussions about how we could mobilise in governance structures, learners, social partners and other stakeholders.

Participants were invited, fed by the richness of the mornings discussions to test the toolkit and complete it in working groups. As with other tools, it has been refined and improved as a consequence of the discussions and commentary, and the edited version is included here.

WORKSHOPPING TOGETHER: TOWARDS AN EQAVET INSPIRED TOOL TO SUPPORT THINKING ABOUT GOVERNANCE

Introduction: 5 minutes

The Facilitator introduces the session and the objectives, including EQAVET indicative descriptors and the opportunity to reflect and explore together on how they may assist in developing robust governance regionally and locally.

Objective of session:	To support thinking on governance using EQAVET lens, testing a 'tool' To build familiarity with EQAVET indicative descriptors
What does EQAVET aim to do?	Support an evaluation and quality improvement culture
Why?	Promoting mutual trust, mobility, permeability
How?	Strengthening governance across Europe, nationally, regionally, locally, sectorially, systemically
What do you need?	To use this tool, you must 'BYOD' - Bring your own device' so that you can access the EQAVET website during the exercise. The exercise takes three hours' duration.

Task 1 *(30 minutes: Suggest 15 minutes' brain storm and discussion in small groups, then 15 minutes' feedback to whole group)*

Meanings associated with 'governance' *e.g. subsidiarity, professional judgement, autonomy, oversight, accountability...*

Please insert your core words in the bubble below at this stage of the day

Task 2 *(45 minutes' exercise, 40 minutes' feedback to plenary. Sub-groups are formed to each look at separate headings Planning, Implementation, Evaluation, Review. Each sub-group needs a Rapporteur to provide feedback to the whole group)*

Using EQAVET www.eqavet.eu/qc/gns/home.aspx (Providers site)

Can we talk about indicative descriptors, governance and your service/practice?

4 stages: Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review. Each sub-group takes one aspect, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation, Review and explores the indicative descriptors as a group. In discussion, work to answer the questions identified in the tables below, linking back to your own provision.

Stage: Planning	Indicative descriptors	How many relate to governance? (rank 1-3, where 3 is very relevant)	Are they covered in your provider system? (where?)	Is there data associated in your system? (state link)
1	European, national and regional VET policy goals/ objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers			
2	Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored			
3	Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs			
4	Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated			
5	There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development			
6	Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers			
7	The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs			
8	VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place			

Stage: Implementation	Indicative descriptors	How many relate to governance? (rank 1-3, where 3 is very relevant)	Are they covered in your provider system? (where?)	Is there data associated in your system? (state link)
1	Resources are appropriately internally aligned/ assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans			
2	Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned			
3	The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers			
4	Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance			

Stage: Evaluation	Indicative descriptors	How many relate to governance? (rank 1-3, where 3 is very relevant)	Are they covered in your provider system? (where?)	Is there data associated in your system? (state link)
1	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers			
2	Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction			
3	Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders			
4	Early warning systems are implemented			

Stage: Review	Indicative descriptors	How many relate to governance? (rank 1-3, where 3 is very relevant)	Are they covered in your provider system? (where?)	Is there data associated in your system? (state link)
1	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			
2	Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available			
3	Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation			
4	Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place			

Task 3 *(30 Minutes: 20 minutes' discussion in small groups, 10 minutes' feedback)*

As a small working group, **having listened to the feedback in plenary from task 2, can you agree the most useful/telling indicative descriptor for each of the four stages** (planning, implementation, evaluation, review) **from a governance perspective?**

- **Planning- Indicative descriptor number:** _____
- **Implementation- Indicative descriptor number:** _____
- **Evaluation- Indicative descriptor number:** _____
- **Review- Indicative descriptor number:** _____

Feedback as plenary

Task 4

Closing task / call to action: 5 minutes
Identify one reflection, inspiration or challenge to your current practice from the Indicative Descriptors and discussions of the day. Share with a colleague.

_____

_____

_____

Possible extension work:
Explore together the 'plus sign' on the web page to agree ONE indicator per stage for discussion in context of 'governance'

_____

_____

_____

Reflections

The second part of the tool required direct investigation of the EQAVET resources, indicators, indicative descriptors, building blocks and case studies. Time allocated was too short for this but the key points raised in discussion are important to note:

- The wealth of resources is invaluable for the work that we are trying to do. We need time to explore these.
- Need to familiarise ourselves with these so that we can use them strategically in line with projects we are working on.
- Could we start with just one project or theme?
- Building blocks in particular are useful.
- How to find ways to extend this exploration with others across the sector, as part of this Network
- Appreciation for the change of tack with fewer speakers and more time for discussion.

EQAVET+Working Group Update

Alan briefly updated about a dialogue in his EQAVET+ Working Group regarding a possible beginner's guide or overview so that people could locate themselves and their practice more easily in the Framework. LCETB are contributing a case study in that regard. Andrina thanked Alan on behalf of the Network and the NRP for the contribution he and LCETB were making to the Working Group, particularly in volunteering the case study. Active membership and support in these groups is important and helps to keep all of us actively involved in, informed by and connected to European developments.

> **"The EQAVET resources and these conversations and debates are like nourishing soil! We need to dig it well into the work we are doing so that we can thrive. I am blue in the face being told that QA is so important and that everything hangs off it. So we need to feed it and feed it well!"**

Annual Forum update, Dr Niamh Lenehan, QQI

EQAVET hosts an Annual Forum, this year over the course of Brussels VET week, and members of the IQAVET Steering Group were in attendance. A rich networking and learning experience, it was also an important opportunity to gain insight into the vision for EQAVET at European level and to key accomplishments over 2016.

Presentations outlined the history of VET co-operation with a view to signalling perhaps a new era to come as the Commission consider leadership and strategic direction beyond 2020. Presentations will be made available on the EQAVET website.

It was stressed that EQAVET was not a model or 'how to' manual, but an invitation, to be involved, to get engaged, to contribute as experts in what we do, to participate in a community of practice about quality assurance in VET. Different workshops offered different insights, for example into tracking VET graduates, the quality assurance of workplace learning etc. The EU-wide Apprenticeship Alliance has been formed, with a toolkit based on practices in dual-system countries, but it includes a focus on governance.

Fundamentally, the key learning for all of us is around getting involved, whether in the Network, in PLAs, in activities or just by using the website, we are invited to be part of EQAVET.

The **concluding session** of the seminar was presented by Andrina; noting the end of the Slovak Presidency of the EU and the commencement of the Maltese and some of the key areas of work that may impact.

A new Recommendation is under discussion with regard to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), with significant debate among Member States as to the nature of developments and revisions that may be desirable and the most appropriate methods for achieving this.

The Europass Decision is also being revised with the hope that a general approach will be agreed by the end of 2017.

Governance is of concern, and efficiencies in governance across all the European tools and instruments, which can appear complex and unwieldy at times.

EQAVET 2017 work plans are in development, with a grant application process commencing in February 2017 for a two-year period; applications would be consistent with the EQAVET work plan, Riga Conclusions and with the New Skills Agenda for Europe. A real focus both nationally and across Europe is on the quality of work based learning, the importance of feedback loops, based on learning outcomes. Project management, Steering Group and NRP engagement is key in making any submission. The NRP however intends in 2017 to host our dissemination event, and to manage our own study visit to Northern Ireland looking at the amalgamated colleges and the impact of quality assurance systems in that context. We hope to use this event also to showcase some of your learning from international participation in PLAs and working groups.

The EQAVET Strategic Plan, 2016-17, states that it will foster 'sustainable and inclusive activities-oriented co-operation among key stakeholders at every level'. In this context we hope to grow and consolidate our Network, sharing effective practices and solutions, deepening our national and international links, and providing study visits as appropriate and disseminating the learning as effectively as possible.

Takeaway Learning

- EQAVET is part of an EU wide system of governance, based on the 'open method of co-operation' and 'horizontal co-operation' where Member States co-operate and share good practice to stimulate improvement
- Patchworks of VET governance is not unusual globally, and nationally different systems pertain across ETBs, schools, community and voluntary sectors; sectoral consistency in VET governance merits in depth consideration possibly in conjunction with sectoral QA Guidelines.
- Governance is seen as an enabler. It enables
  - The important triumph over the urgent
  - Bringing 'the bulls' to the table
  - Respectful and inclusive conversations, building relationships
  - Risk mitigation
  - Self-leadership as a helpful concept against managerialism and control
- Governance is seen as being about people and requiring people in order to be effective – it requires staffing and structures
- Governance can be directly linked to actions, e.g. shared narratives, assessment, improvement-oriented practices

IRELAND OF THE WELCOMES- HOSTING VISITING NRPS

IQAVET Ireland, the National Reference Point was delighted to host two study visits from visiting National Reference Points, and with the generous support of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB and City of Dublin ETB, were able to provide hands on experience in a 'VET-in-Action' field trip with learners and practitioners in VET provision over 2016.

The delegations were given comprehensive briefings by the QQI team and by Dr Bryan Fields, SOLAS, on the policy framework and key directions for VET in Ireland. This was then brought to life in meetings with learners in initial and continuing vocational or further education and training in Ireland.

ANNUAL FORUM REPORT

The EQAVET Annual Forum is an invaluable opportunity for the Network to take stock, celebrate achievements and focus on new directions for the coming year. National Reference Points connect with each other, share practice and ideas and reflect together with other experts, building the community of practice. This year, the Secretariat allowed NRPs bring additional delegates, and Ireland responded to the invitation by bringing the volunteer Steering Group members who have given time and commitment over 2016 to getting our own network going. The note below summarise key points from a selection of sessions, but signals areas for consideration nationally and internationally - the VET Strategy? Work based learning and how best to quality assure it?

The Annual Forum took place in the first VET week, and was one of 1300 events across the EU with a VET focus in a single week. It is thought that some 830,000 people were involved in promoting VET through different events across the EU.

Chaired by Sean Feerick, Director of the EQAVET Secretariat, a wide range of presentations were given, updating NRPs at policy and regional levels.

Joao Santos, Deputy Head of Unit, Vocational and Adult Education DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission, spoke to possible futures for EQAVET and the stocktaking on VET generally. This presentation was important in that it really stimulates debate as to the core function and objectives for VET in EU policy.

Key points are summarised:

- Riga Conclusions- set medium term goals for 2015-2020; need to act on what we have now. The Commission has agreed a work programme for 2017, and there is a work programme EQAVET 2017, a strategic view for VET for 2017.
- But - post 2020? VET was in the Treaty of Rome since the beginning; 60 years ago now. In 1958, EU co-operation in VET was foreseen, and the first Council decision made in this regard formally, in 1963. We have 10 key principles as to how to co-operate in VET, but there is a sense now among the communities of practice that we would like to go further forward. Since 1963, we have a further 40 key decisions, 40 pieces of legislation. It is time to take stock, and look at a historical overview or perspective. The general view is that it is time for a fitness check. Are things generally fit for purpose?
- We feel that our first step should be a large scale stakeholder consultation, and invite you to consider this. What, in your view, with regard to VET, has added value at EU level? What are the important elements? Is it the mobility of learners and workers? The Council Recommendation on VET in 2018-19 identified Mobility as key. What do you think?
- Principles in VET co-operation within the EU are to be named. What do member states think of added value of EU co-operation in VET? What is the consensus? We need broad engagement with these questions, which are important policy questions and perspectives.

- Is the Recommendation on EQAVET still 'fit for purpose?' Does it need annexes? Would it be more appropriate to do a review of the Recommendation? This would give us a global or overarching Recommendation on VET with technical annexes, e.g. for VET credit systems etc., Skills Agenda, Youth Initiative and so on.
- We value the expertise of EQAVET - but how should we pursue quality assurance at EU level in VET? How can we achieve strong quality assurance? Is there a global vision for the quality assurance of VET- or is it just 'EQAVET forever'? Do we need to change?
- Let's do what is best for quality assurance in VET without preconditions.
- Is VET attractiveness is more important than quality assurance, employability? What produces change? What drives reform?

A range of presentations followed on the key roles of NRPs in implementing EQAVET.

Dana Stroie, National Centre for Technical and Vocational Development, Romania, on 'Making VET more attractive and pathways to transition easier'.

- The NRP is legislatively established. There is co-ordination of the harmonization of QA in education and training within the formal structures.
- Objectives include: collecting and disseminating good practice at both EU and national level and promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET
- Awareness of VET and of the central role of QA in VET is created via project website, database of relevant materials and via information sessions; Disseminating policies and instruments elaborated within EQAVET and by the project via the website, database of relevant materials and via information services

Compendium of good practice has been developed nationally on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET

- Success stories of VET graduates
- Good practice of school-company partnerships
- Good practice in promoting VET at national level

A policy brief on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET is available on the EQAVET website.

Key messages

- Embrace a strategic vision regarding VET attractiveness and embedding this in all VET reform nationally
- Promote horizontal co-operation with employers
- Ensure constant and positive presence of VET in the mass media
- Updated website, comprehensive communications strategy- national, regional, local, school level

Lessons and challenges

- Sensitive aspects of QA- long term project
- Involvement of all parties is essential
- Coherence and synergy of actions is hard-earned
- Teachers and practitioners at the heart

Franz Gramlinger, ARQAVET, Austrian Reference Point for QA in VET, updated on a project 'Putting teachers at the heart of quality management'

- Joint activity from Austrian and Finnish NRPs, establishing an exchange and development group (EDG), with four other countries, DE, NL, RO, Scotland, UK. 6 countries in total,1 representative from each NRP and 1 from a provider/Ministry; two meetings were held of 2 and half days duration each over the course of the project.

- Aim: to involve teachers in quality management systems and QA procedures, to exchange discussion and mutual learning. We asked the questions, whether there is a special concept for teachers involved in the QMS, and whether teachers use QMS to improve teaching and learning?
- 'The most difficult task is to involve teachers' is crucial for successful implementation of quality management systems, how to ensure that teachers really benefit from QMS? We have clear definitions of teacher's roles and tasks. We have a sense of the competences that are needed for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning, and in the provision of training offers. Does this change if we focus on the benefits of QM for teachers? We make reference to feedback as part of professional attitude and knowledge. The project seeks to make principals/directors aware of role of teachers in QM and the importance of role model effects. We found that language has to be translated/modified. Systems need to be co- constructed, not done to…
- There are challenges in how to make visible quality management in a school. Consideration has to be given to a visible support structure. Prof Geoff Hayward, Cambridge, writes of moving 'from inspections to habits of practice'-grounding quality concepts, arguing that quality is really personal. Our challenge was how to translate that language.
- Aim of project- to seek out and exchange of examples of good practice regarding the work of an NRP- the involvement of teachers in quality management systems and quality assurance procedures- exchange, discussion and mutual learning: do partner countries have special concepts for the involvement of teachers in QM? How can teachers be motivated to use QA instruments to improve their teaching and learning processes? How can providers work systematically on teacher involvement? How can teachers of future teachers be trained with regard to the application of QA instruments? Can we identify existing good practices in our countries? Do existing QMS sufficiently refer to teachers? How do they address this important target group?
- Aim to produce a practical report, key recommendations, keep topic alive. Meeting Feb 2017

Koen Bois d'Enghien, European Commission, DG Employment, chaired the second session.

Graduate tracking, Dr Arancha Oviedo, Policy Officer with the EQAVET Secretariat

Arancha set the scene in referring to the challenge to make VET more attractive by having a strong evidence base demonstrating that there are strong outcomes VET programmes. This may involve building capacity, with mapping studies across all member states as a second component. The intention is to further exploit current data sources, accessing the current employment rates of graduates. Then we will be in a position to target improvements, based on analysis of outcomes. We want to be able to source and use graduate tracking.

A new network is to be established- of administrators collecting data regarding graduate tracking, although we are still reflecting on how to launch this with the DGEAC, HE and VET stakeholders. Identification of potential members of the network, a procedure to identify potential members of a network, are under consideration, as are mechanisms to keep members of EQAVET and Data Network if and when established, mutually informed.

Tracking students and graduates, Thea Van Den Bloom, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands, and CINOPS, Alie Camphuis; this presentation concerned the use of destination data and Placement Rate in VET, and referenced existing EQAVET Policy Briefs.

Indicator no 5 refers to the labour market outcomes of VET. It includes:

- Where learners go after programmes by tracking learner destinations, share of graduates in employment
- PLA will be held in Wales in September 2017; Focus- challenges and barriers to tracking- methods, surveys, challenges to tracking destinations, in a feedback loop.
- Recommendations -
  - Data collected via surveys needs to be an integral part of the QA cycle, if the 'loop' is to be closed

- Graduates feedback on their destination should influence the VET provision and system and enhance VET learners' learning outcomes.
- Tracking graduates, whether in the labour market or VET, supports the link between the VET systems and the labour market enabling assessment of the relevance of VET officers, links skills demand and supply, allowing policy makers to assess the effectiveness of the system and its short term alignment with the needs of the workforce. It would / could assist in deepening employer engagement.

- Findings- 75% use to improve relevance. 25% don't use to explain success / failure in terms of the percentage of graduates to find work or progress. 57% use data gathering and VET tracking to comply with legal regulations, 64% to be accountable to stakeholders, 71% to track transition from VET learning to employment or FET, and 29% to discover whether graduates had an easy or difficult time getting a decent or satisfactory job.
- Issues are not straightforward- it is common enough that there is educational mismatch, lack of work experience and an absence of firm specific skills
- Data student progression - 76% of countries use it as part of self-evaluation. Accreditation, programme design, benchmarking; all countries expressed a view that it helped improve VET provision but- data management is costly, involves validation of data, consistency and methodological issues, and administrative burdens.
- Period examined- 1,2,3 years? The question is how long does it take to know, and what is a good outcome - full time, part time work, relevant work, in field, any field?
- **Policy recommendations:**
  1. Member States in cooperation with employers, VET providers and, where appropriate, social partners, need to design and implement reforms in VET systems to make them more responsive to current and future labour market needs.
  2. Member States should expand the practice of apprenticeships beyond secondary VET and introduce apprenticeships / dual learning across all sectors and educational pathways, notably higher VET to increase excellence and attractiveness
  3. As part of a renewed EU strategy on flexicurity, the European Commission should set up an EU system of benchmarking which could have particular added value to promote education and training provision (including apprenticeship) that better meets labour market needs

Policy brief is available.

Dr Anja Lietzmann, K.o.s. GmbH, Germany: Further developing QA in VET

Finding and Retaining Apprentices: A Quality Model for European Enterprises

This work was aimed at young people who are out of school, not in school and asked how a company might market itself as a training provider? It worked to provide '20 quality rules for the modern apprenticeship provider', e.g. :

- Make recruitment a priority- lay the groundwork
- Change outlooks - new target groups. Think like applicants. Convince on the factual and emotional level. Optimise access to your target group.
- Think long-term - starting with apprenticeship, individual start-ups, projects etc.
- Employers have to have structures they understand and can engage with. This may require changes in language and the development of specific communications structures.
- Quality of staff was identified as a key enabler
- Institutions need to consider how to motivate and orient themselves towards understanding student needs. Should the QA of work-based learning be regulated?

Leena Koski, Finnish National Board of Education, Finnish Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET and Jatta Herranen, North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium, Finland, spoke to the theme of self-assessment procedures and VET providers.

In Finland, some 134 VET providers are merging to form larger entities, a federation of municipalities, without an Inspectorate system.

There are two parts to self-assessment within the quality system: Quality management- a Recommendation as part of legal framework, which requires self-assessment from VET providers and particularly from national external evaluations.

Providers can choose their own method of quality management and self-assessment. By 2015, should have effective quality management system. Self-assessment is systematic, but the provider chooses their own method.

Jatta Herranen. North Karelia Municipality, Education and Training Consortia, is a consortia of nine different units and 8 colleges. Budget is at the heart of the budget management cycle. Pedagogical self-evaluation is a similar concept. Individual teachers do individual self-evaluation, opting for coaching model for teachers generally, and they develop their own tasks e.g. for 2017, based on self-evaluation reports. National Framework standards are measured and evaluated against, every four years, using an EQF-type model twice for self-evaluation, twice for specific subject self-evaluation; an area of debate was whether criteria of each model match and support each other? Routinely? Sometimes? Do we need more detailed criteria in teaching and learning?

Quality award systems are symbolic awards to recognise excellence, and are competed for voluntarily; providers are eager to stay part of that award. It is based on external evaluation, concentrating on quality systems. If a provider achieves the award, they cannot re-enter for another three years so as to prevent monopolies and promote diversity within the system.

The Ministry pays for the external evaluation. The quality report and self-evaluation reports are published. Media are not generally interested. Budget and financial reports are aligned with developmental goals.

Issues raised in discussion included: systems development and variances in approaches in different countries, challenges in identifying indicators, selecting which EQAVET indicator, preventing overload, prioritising improvement areas, the degrees of centralisation/decentralisation, and market forces and the role of competition in VET provision.

Carlo Scatoli, Policy Officer, European Commission facilitated an update on the focus on work-based learning and apprenticeship:

Alliance for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning (to be established, March 2017)

- Work-based learning standards in education and training throughout the EU- the focus of our questioning now is how to guide work-based learning and apprenticeship towards high quality, with a wide interpretation on apprenticeship being taken.
- Working on a wider VET proposal for 2018 - which kind of legal form will it take? What has been agreed so far? Looking at objectives now, for beyond 2020.
- Co-operation in the VET arena is under discussion, with examination of possibilities of a common / comprehensive policy document, some EU training documents also- last overarching instrument was agreed in 1963, legally still a valid document.

Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) invites the Commission and Member States to

- Further develop the European Alliance for Apprenticeship
- Develop support services for knowledge sharing and co-operation
- Set up demand driven 'national apprenticeship and WBL partnerships'
- Further reform apprenticeship systems with appropriate frameworks, support structures for SMEs, permeable pathways
- Look for approaches to diversify apprenticeship across sectors

Opinion of the ACVT

- Aim - providing a clear basis to foster quality and effective apprenticeship in Europe
- Feed into determining the next steps of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and contribute to the associated priorities of the Riga Conclusions
- Recognitions of apprenticeship and WBL as an effective approach for (youth) employment and active citizenship
- Recognition of need to mobilise actors for concrete actions at country regional and local level

European social partners will

- explore the possibility of further joint activities including with a view to achieving higher levels of mobility of apprentices across Europe.
- engage in wider debate with the European institutions and the Member States to discuss the policy priorities for supporting the provision, effectiveness and quality of apprenticeships
- work
  - to pave the way for a tripartite opinion of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training between employers, trade unions and Member States
  - to provide a clear basis to foster quality and effective apprenticeships in Europe, to feed into determining the next steps of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and would contribute to the associated priorities of the Riga Conclusions.
  - Towards a shared vision of apprenticeships- joint statement of the European social partners

Apprenticeship systems need to be governed with the appropriate agreement of social partners, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices and partnerships, with providers and public authorities.

It is important that the European Commission further encourages and promotes mutual learning and the exchange of practices and ideas between relevant actors to support Member States and national social partners in adapting the governance of apprenticeship systems.

NEXT STEPS FOR IQAVET

2016 was an important year for the NRP and for IQAVET in that we formally established a QA Practitioner Network and Steering Group to help us fulfill some of the mandate of the EQAVET Recommendation, for the first time orienting towards practitioners directly. While this report outlines learning and discussion over the course of our work together, it also signals some key strategic directions that should inform IQAVET going forward.

At EU level, there is a strong focus on reconsidering the policy framework for VET, apprenticeship and work-based learning, regardless of where it takes place.

This is matched nationally. The long-term consideration beyond 2020 is one that as a network we can track and engage with, both nationally as consideration begins for the new post 2019 FET Strategy and for VET services regionally, and internationally as Ireland continues to play its part in Europe.

Stronger engagement with the workplace is already a key part of the work of VET services nationally. As new national apprenticeship programmes come on stream and are extended, the quality assurance of learning and mentoring of learning in programmes, regardless of where they are being delivered, will be of greater concern to quality assurance practitioners.

Themes identified as priorities in 2016 by our volunteer Steering Group, Siobhan Magee (FESS) Alan Hogan (LCETB), Martha Bolger (KCETB), Anne Higgins (GRETB) and Eithne Ni Dhonnchadha (GRETB), are still current:

> Providers working with SOLAS and QQI have more integrated data on a wide range of topics and themes consistent with EQAVET at their disposal than ever before. It is clear that for this evidence base to inform and enrich quality assurance practice that time, skill and capacity building is needed.
>
> Self-Evaluation is a priority nationally, both in terms of Governance for 2017, and for 2018-19 across all policies and procedures, in the ETB sector and for other VET sectors in similar timeframes. It remains a key objective within the EQAVET programme of work.
>
> Governance is the focus of self-evaluation in the ETB sector in 2017.

The EQAVET Quality Framework has resources that support development with regard to these topics.

As a network, IQAVET has some unfinished business also, parts of our work plan that we did not manage to complete within our short year, such was the scale of our ambition. The NRP is pleased to support this work and is planning our study visit, opportunities to showcase learning from participation of VET delegates in peer learning and other events. However, we felt that some of the strongest signals for immediate direction came from members when you asked for time to investigate together the wealth of resources that the EQAVET website provides and in the words of one expert, 'time to be nourished by them, to dig them through the soil of our quality assurance practice'.

The proposed agenda then for 2017 includes:

- Network meetings digging deeper into EQAVET resources and into identified themes of self-evaluation, governance and data and consideration of new themes in collaboration with the steering group and practitioners
- Participation in study visits, peer-learning activities and relevant conferences as part of the EQAVET network and consolidating our connections with VET policy development across Europe
- Showcasing of our learning so as to build our community of practice, nationally and across the EQAVET network; strengthening our communications
- An additional focus on the quality assurance of work-based learning in all its forms, including apprenticeship and traineeships.

This report or learning journal of three seminars and the work of the Network over 2016 reflects a series of thematic discussions, conversations and reflections to the best of our ability. Because of the dynamic nature of the events, it cannot be fully accurate nor comprehensive although every effort has been made in that regard. The author alone accepts responsibility for errors and omissions, but none-the-less hopes that overall, the document honours the spirit and integrity of your contribution and of our year's work.

APPENDIX

Form QP-SESAOR

Revision 1

Self Evaluation Support Area Overall Report

General Information

Support Area: _____

Staff involved

Evidence used to support this Self Evaluation Report

Submitted by: _____ **Date:** _____

I support the content of this report and agree with the actions:

Assistant Principal: _____ **Date:** _____

[redacted]

Form QP-SESAOR

Revision 1

Self Evaluation Support Area Overall Report

Progress on Actions				
SMART Action	**Responsible**	**Target Date**	**Progress / Impact**	**Closed**

Form	QP-SESAOR
Revision	1

Self Evaluation Support Area Overall Report

Service user satisfaction

Self-assessment questions	Grading = ✓			
How aware are the team of who your service users are?				
How well do you collaborate with and meet service user needs?				
What evidence do you collect to establish service user satisfaction?				
How well have you used feedback from your service users?				

Resources

Self-assessment questions	Grading = ✓			
Do you have the right resources for service delivery?				
How well are your resources allocated and managed?				

Self Evaluation Support Area Overall Report

Staffing and CPD

Self-assessment questions	Grading = ✓			
Do staff have the relevant skills, qualifications and experience?				
How well do staff work in a team?				
What is your team Absence Rate vs. the 3% College Target?				
How does CPD uptake measure against the 6 days College Target?				
What types of CPD have staff participated in?				

Evaluation of Equalities

Self-assessment questions	Grading = ✓			
What have you done in the past year to promote Eliminate Discrimination, Advance Equality of Opportunity and Foster Good Relations and how effective were these measures?				

Example of Mainstreaming	1	2	3	4	5	6	PSED1	PSED2	PSED3

Key:

Glasgow Clyde College Equality Related Strategic Aims

1. Delivering high quality learning and teaching
2. Depth, breadth and aspiration throughout the curriculum
3. Promoting excellence through research and innovation
4. Developing effective, confident and resilient students and staff
5. Being the partner of choice
6. Achieving institutional stability

Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED)

PSED1 Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct

PSED2 Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not

PSED3 Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Self Evaluation Support Area Overall Report

Future Improvements

What are your priorities for future improvements and what do you plan to develop? How do you plan to improve service user satisfaction? What resources are planned for longer term and how will you improve your use of resources? What are your priorities for staffing and CPD? What are the priorities for improving promotion of Equalities?

SMART actions

Actions for the coming year		
SMART Action	**Responsible**	**Target Date**

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Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union