

May 2024 Analysis Report: Outcomes from the Questionnaire and Focus Groups

1. INTRODUCTION

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority is implementing the Erasmus + Programme project 'CPD in VET QA'.

This report will provide an overview of where VET Institutions across Europe stand vis a vis European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Framework, including gaps and barriers to its implementation, as well as examples of good practice based on two main activities:

- online survey that was disseminated during January and February 2024 among 50 Institutions across Europe and
- three focus groups.

This questionnaire aimed to comprehensively assess various facets of VET both on system and provider level, focusing on strategic management, quality assurance, innovative teaching methods, and internationalization initiatives.

Following the completion of this survey a number of online and live focus group discussions were organised. These discussions provided an opportunity to delve deeper into the issues highlighted in the survey, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and best practices.

The goal of this project is to facilitate positive changes in VET institutions, driven by evidence-based insights gathered from the experience of those working in VET institutions. The collective pan-European knowledge gathered through this survey and subsequent focus groups will contribute to the development of tailored solutions in CPD courses that will ultimately improve the quality of VET in Europe.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on VET Quality Assurance" focused on evaluating the understanding of various aspects of quality assurance mechanisms within Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems. The aim of the survey was to gather insights on how different VET stakeholders view, implement and maintain quality standards. Key areas of interest include the:

1. Strategy, policies and procedures
2. Maintaining and continuously improving QA system in VET Institutions
3. Quality Assurance of work-based learning
4. Quality Assurance of micro-credentials
5. Synergies between ESG standards and EQAVET Framework
6. Innovation in Teaching and Learning
7. Internationalization

The questionnaire also sought to identify best practices and areas for improvement in quality assurance processes, focusing on above mentioned topics.

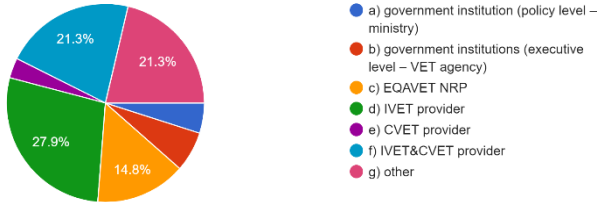
2.1. Demographics

61 responses were gathered. The list includes the **following countries** and their frequency of mentions:

- **Malta:** 19
- **Denmark:** 1
- **Luxembourg:** 1
- **Croatia:** 7
- **Lithuania:** 7
- **Slovenia:** 3
- **Czech Republic:** 5
- **Romania:** 9
- **Netherlands:** 1
- **Italy:** 7
- **Portugal:** 1

Malta is the most frequently present **country**, followed by Lithuania and Romania. Croatia and Italy are next, with significant mentions. Other countries are represented fewer times.

Your institution:
61 responses



When looking at the **background** of the respondents we noticed that majority of them were VET providers (including 28% IVET providers and 21,3% IVET/CVET providers). Second most present was undefined group of “other”.

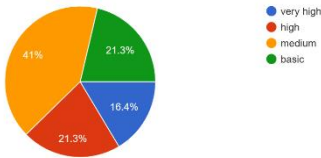
There were almost 15% of NRP representatives, followed by 11% of government bodies (ministries, VET Agencies) representatives.

Analysis of **working experience** shows that the largest group of individuals have more than 15 years of working experience.

- **<5 years:** 13 entries
- **5-10 years:** 10 entries
- **11-15 years:** 10 entries
- **>15 years:** 26 entries

2.2. QA Background

Level of familiarity with EQAVET:
61 responses



The majority of respondents have less than 5 years of **experience in QA** in VET, followed closely by those with 5-10 years and 10-15 years of experience. There are fewer respondents with more than 15 years of experience.

The majority of respondents have a medium level of familiarity with **EQAVET**, followed by a high level of familiarity. There are equal numbers of respondents with a very high and basic level of familiarity.

2.3. Strategy, policies and procedures

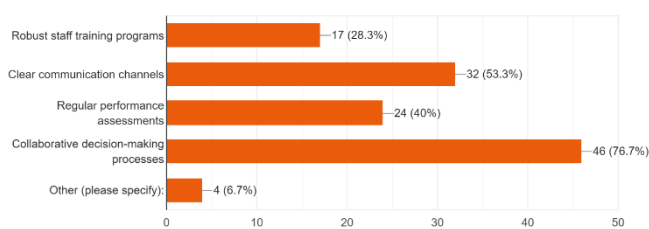
The majority of respondents (49 out of 59) either strongly agreed or agreed that the strategies and policies support their effectiveness in providing quality education.

Some key points on primary **challenges** from those who strongly agreed or agreed:

- Majority mentioned Lack of clear communication, Insufficient resources, Resistance to change,
- Less than 1/3 mentioned inadequate training programmes.

Overall, while most felt their institution's strategies and policies were supportive, there were still areas identified for improvement around communication, resources, change management, and training to better align policies with educational quality.

Are there specific policies or procedures that have proven particularly effective in achieving the institution's strategic goals? (Select all that apply)
60 responses



Among specific policies or procedures that have **proven** particularly effective in achieving the institution's strategic goals there is dominance of response related to Collaborative decision-making processes, with more than 76% respondents listing it as effective, followed by 53% of clear communication channels.

Analysis of the responses identified the **five most common tasks or topics for the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme** related to strategic management in VET institutions as follows:

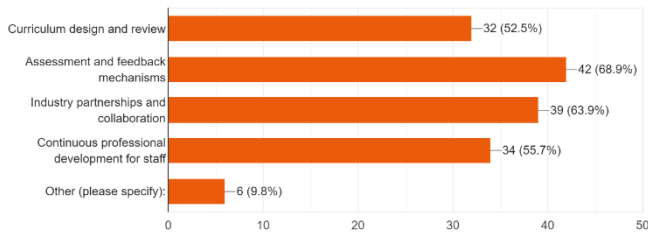
1. *Strategic Planning*: This includes topics like strategic planning processes, mission, vision, values, strategic management in VET institutions, and adaptation of tutors to company requirements.
2. *Leadership and Management*: This encompasses leadership skills, coordination skills, staff management, and mentoring.
3. *Communication and Collaboration*: This involves communication skills, effective communication with students, collaboration between staff members, engaging people in change management, cooperation with local stakeholders, and cross-ministerial collaboration.
4. *Quality Assurance and Evaluation*: This includes quality assurance, quality management, monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan, quality evaluation indicators, and evaluation of existing scenarios.
5. *Change Management*: Topics related to change management strategies, change implementation, coping with uncertainty, managing conflicts, and adapting to market requirements.

These topics emerged as the most common themes across the responses. Therefore, for the CPD program, it would be essential to include modules covering these areas to enhance skills related to strategic management in VET institutions.

2.4. Maintaining and Continuously Improving QA System in VET Institutions

A large majority of respondents were very active or active in quality assurance activities within their VET institutions.

Are there any specific aspects of quality assurance within VET that you believe need more focus and attention? (Select all that apply)
61 responses



When asked about specific **aspects** of quality assurance within VET, which need more focus and attention, at the top of respondents' list is assessment and feedback mechanisms, followed by equally present industry partnerships and collaboration, CPD as well as curriculum design.

Time constraints emerged as the top challenge to ensuring active participation in quality assurance activities in the respective VET institutions, being selected in over half of the responses. This indicates that finding dedicated time amidst other responsibilities is a major hurdle for staff to actively engage in quality assurance activities. The lack of proper incentives or motivation was the second most cited challenge, highlighting the need for mechanisms to encourage and reward participation. Limited awareness among staff about quality assurance processes and their importance was also frequently mentioned as an obstacle. Inadequate feedback mechanisms, which can hinder effective quality assurance, was raised by several respondents as well.

Overall, the responses suggest that addressing time constraints, providing incentives, raising awareness, and improving feedback processes could help boost active staff participation in quality assurance efforts within VET institutions.

Upon analysis of the responses and identification of the **top three most common tasks or topics to include in a CPD programme** aimed at enhancing skills in maintaining and continuously improving quality assurance (QA) systems in VET institutions, the following themes emerged:

- 1. Feedback and Communication:* Ensuring learner participation in QA surveys, giving permanent and adequate feedback and maintaining open communication channels, supporting the development of skills to analyse feedback and strengthen awareness about the review phase of the quality cycle.
- 2. Quality Assurance Standards and Tools:* information about methods and tools for quality assurance and improvement, quality assurance standards and guidelines, definition of quality evaluation indicators, benchmarking.
- 3. Strategic Planning and Implementation:* strategic planning for QA, alignment of objectives and assessment of feedback, understanding policy and practice, and their implications on QA.

These three areas were seen by respondents as crucial for ensuring that QA systems in VET institutions are robust, comprehensive, and continuously improving.

2.5. Quality Assurance of Work-Based Learning

Almost 60% of respondents indicated that they **perceived** quality assurance measures for work-based learning programs as highly effective or effective.

Based on the responses provided, the three most common **challenges** in ensuring the effectiveness of quality assurance measures for work-based learning programmes are:

1. Limited Industry Collaboration: Frequent mentions across the responses could indicate difficulty in establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with industry stakeholders. This challenge impacts the relevance and applicability of the learning experience.

2. Resource Constraints: resource constraints are a recurrent theme, indicating that limited financial, human, and material resources hinder the ability to implement and sustain effective QA measures.

3. Inconsistent Evaluation Criteria: Inconsistent evaluation criteria also emerge as a significant challenge, pointing to the lack of standardized measures and benchmarks for assessing the quality and effectiveness of work-based learning programmes.

These challenges highlight the need for targeted strategies to foster industry partnerships, secure necessary resources, and develop consistent evaluation frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of quality assurance in work-based learning programs.

Based on the responses provided, the **top three common themes for tasks or topics to include in a CPD programme** to strengthen skills and knowledge in quality assurance of work-based learning programs are:

1. Communication and Collaboration: enhancing skills in effective communication and cooperation with stakeholders, including employers, learners, and regulatory bodies, to ensure cohesive curriculum planning and stakeholder engagement in work-based learning programmes.

2. Pedagogical and Professional Skills: developing the professional and pedagogical skills of mentors and trainers, including training in age-appropriate teaching methods, special educational needs (SEN), digital literacy, and reflective practice to improve the learning experience and outcomes.

3. Quality Assurance Methods and Tools: providing knowledge and training on quality assurance techniques, legal and ethical considerations, and evaluation methods specific to work-based learning programmes to ensure high standards and continuous improvement in educational delivery and assessment.

2.6. Quality Assurance of Micro-Credentials

The topic of Micro-Credentials is seen as a novelty since less than 40% have earned or offered micro-credentials in their institution.

Furthermore, the responses indicate that while many are confident in the **quality assurance processes for micro-credentials**, there is also a notable proportion of neutrality and some lack of confidence, suggesting areas for potential improvement and further investigation to understand the underlying reasons for these perceptions.

Based on the responses provided, **the three common answers for tasks or topics to incorporate in a CPD programme** tailored for quality assurance of micro-credentials are:

1. Quality Assurance Methods and Tools: incorporating training on specific methods and tools for ensuring and improving quality assurance processes, making them clear, documented, accessible, and aligned with the needs of learners and stakeholders.

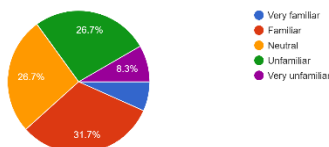
2. Evaluation and Assessment of Micro-Credentials: including evaluation and assessment techniques for micro-credential programmes, focusing on benchmarking, valid assessments, and ensuring transparent, relevant, and learner-centred pathways.

3. Pedagogical and Andragogical Skills: developing the pedagogical and andragogical skills of educators, emphasising programme quality, effective use of digital tools, and appropriate classroom management to enhance teaching and learning experiences.

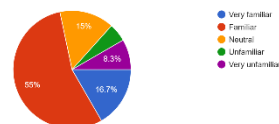
2.7. Synergies between Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Framework

When comparing the **familiarity levels** between the ESG and the EQAVET Framework, we see that for the EQAVET Framework, the most common level of familiarity is "Familiar," whereas for the ESG, it is also "Familiar," but with a much lower value. However, there are fewer occurrences of "Very familiar" for the ESG compared to EQAVET. Additionally, EQAVET has far fewer occurrences of "Unfamiliar" compared to the ESG. Overall, the distribution of familiarity levels varies slightly between the two frameworks, but EQAVET enjoys a high level of familiarity among respondents. This coincides with the 73% of respondents who state their institution does not implement ESG, compared to 43% that do not implement EQAVET.

a. Are you familiar with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)?
60 responses



Are you familiar with the European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Framework?
60 responses

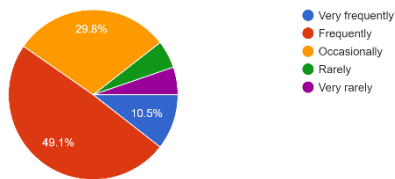


Two common topics for inclusion in the **CPD programme focusing on the synergies between ESG standards and EQAVET principles** are:

1. Understanding the standards and principles of both frameworks and their implementation in VET institutions, including adaptation, monitoring, and assessment.
2. Practical examples and use-cases to illustrate the meaning and impact of ESG and EQAVET frameworks, promoting better understanding among learners and stakeholders.

2.8. Innovation in Teaching and Learning

How often does your institution incorporate innovative teaching and learning methods in your VET courses?
57 responses



From the structure of these answers, we can conclude that the incorporation of innovative teaching and learning methods in VET courses is quite common, with "Frequently" being the most common response. There are also notable instances of "Very frequently," indicating a high level of innovation in

some institutions. However, there are occasional and rare instances as well, suggesting variability in the adoption of innovative methods across different institutions. Overall, the trend indicates a general emphasis on frequent incorporation of innovative teaching and learning methods in VET courses.

When looking into **challenges**, institutions face significant resource constraints, including limited financial resources, insufficient personal resources for training, and a lack of time, all of which impede the sustainable implementation of innovative teaching methods and CPD programmes. There is also considerable resistance to change from teachers, especially senior professionals, who are reluctant to adopt new teaching strategies due to a lack of digital skills, entrenched traditional practices, and an overall reluctance to change. Additionally, the diverse abilities and learning needs of students make it challenging to apply innovative teaching methods effectively, requiring more effort and customized approaches to cater to different capabilities.

To address these challenges, the following **needs** were highlighted: continuous professional development programmes are essential to enhance teachers' digital skills, pedagogical methods, and professional competencies, and to help them overcome resistance to change. Strong support from school management and collaboration among colleagues are also crucial in creating a supportive and encouraging environment for the adoption of innovative practices. Furthermore, simplifying internal processes and providing clear, consistent guidelines can reduce bureaucratic obstacles, ensuring that legal and procedural frameworks are straightforward and stable, thereby motivating teachers to implement new and effective teaching methodologies.

Examples of Innovative Teaching Methods include incorporating role-plays, video observation, and virtual reality (VR) simulations, particularly in fields like nursing, where they have made training more practical and accessible, increasing student engagement by offering risk-free, hands-on experiences. The use of smart technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT) and robotics, has also made specialized programmes more attractive and interactive, enhancing learning outcomes in highly specialized branches. Collaborative learning activities such as group projects, mind mapping, and incorporating game elements in the learning process, as well as flipped classrooms, where students learn content independently and then apply it in the classroom, have positively impacted student engagement by fostering active participation and deeper understanding.

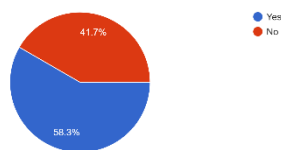
Topics to be included in CPD that were proposed by respondents:

- *Training in Innovative Didactics and Methods*: Enhancing teachers' ability to apply innovative teaching methods effectively through hands-on immersion and participation.
- *Contextual Presentation and Collaboration*: Presenting innovative teaching methods within the vocational education and training context, providing successful examples, and fostering collaboration with colleagues and professionals.

- *Digital Tools and Pedagogies*: Integrating digital tools for interactivity and interaction, as well as developing digital pedagogies to modernize teaching approaches and make learning more engaging.
- *Assessment Design and Student Engagement*: Focusing on assessment design, session planning, and enhancing student engagement and ownership of learning through innovative teaching strategies and the development of transversal skills.

2.9. Internationalization

Have you been involved in internationalization initiatives or programs in your VET institution, and if yes how do they impact the institution?
60 responses



The responses indicate that the majority of respondents have been **involved in internationalization** initiatives or programmes within their VET institutions. This suggests a significant level of engagement with international activities. However, a notable minority have not participated in such initiatives, indicating variability

in internationalization experiences across different institutions or individuals. This disparity might highlight differences in access to resources, institutional priorities, or personal interest in international programmes. Overall, the frequent involvement of many respondents suggests that internationalization is a common and impactful aspect of their VET institutions, potentially contributing to enhanced educational quality, global perspectives, and collaboration opportunities. An overall majority, amounting to more than 85% of respondents, perceive internationalisation as extremely or very important.

The three most common **challenges** perceived in expanding internationalization efforts within VET institutions are:

1. Language barriers
2. Differences in educational systems and standards
3. Administrative complexities

These challenges frequently co-occur and often relate to teaching responsibilities by increasing the workload for faculty, requiring them to navigate additional administrative tasks, adapt to varying educational standards, and overcome communication hurdles.

The most present **proposals for topics for a CPD programme** to equip participants with the necessary skills for successful international initiatives in VET institutions are:

1. Developing language skills to overcome communication barriers.
2. Building partnerships with international VET institutions and industry partners.
3. Implementing quality assurance measures for international collaborations.
4. Cross-cultural teaching and learning strategies.

3. FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Based on the outcomes of the questionnaire, MFHEA held three Focus Groups; fully online events were held on 15th April and 8th May, while a blended Focus Group was held in Estonia on 24th April 2024.

During these focus groups the following topics were covered:

- Strategy and Procedures
- Quality assurance of Work-Based learning
- Maintenance and continuous improvement of quality
- Quality assurance of Micro-credentials
- Innovation in Teaching and learning
- Internationalisation
- Synergies between ESG standards and EQAVET framework.

The pedagogical system envisaged for the CPD programme was also discussed in all three focus groups so as to collect participants' views. An example was provided through www.qalead.eu and the participants were also encouraged to send any material that they would like to share in this CPD. The main points for this CPD pedagogy are to have a Topic with short reading documents, short YouTube videos regarding the topic or any other type of videos, pre-recorded webinar with PowerPoint presentations and both a reflective type of assessment for institutions to use on an internal basis and a short quiz with automated answers for individual use. The aim is to keep the content short but provide opportunities for gaining further knowledge. It is also planned to have the content indicating the target market, for example, whether it is directed towards management, administration, students or external stakeholders.

The attendees have shown great interest and have expressed the wish that the CPD will have a European perspective rather than just a Maltese perspective. They expressed interest in the inclusion of case studies, and they are also ready to contribute with their case studies.

For **Strategies and Policies**, the attendees would like to know the difference between a good strategy and a bad strategy and best way to plan it and follow it up. A basic list of necessary **policies** will be created with guidance on how to present them. The MFHEA is focusing primarily on internal quality assurance within the VET providers, emphasising clear policies and procedures, outlining roles and responsibilities as well as accountability mechanisms for all stakeholders involved in the VET provision. Effective strategies for quality assurance usually also encompass mechanisms for continuous improvement in innovation in that programmes. These can be addressed in policies and procedures intended to identify areas for enhancement and implementation of evidence-based practices within VET providers.

It is also necessary to have a robust set of policies and procedures within VET institutions to ensure that the institution and all of its employees are in compliance with national, regional or sectoral

standards and that allow Institutions to enhance their work, whether it is limited by certain accreditation or verification of their programme.

At the provider level, institutions must have clear organizational structures and mechanisms, outlined in documents, whether they are internal quality assurance policies, school curricula or a quality assurance framework procedure plan.

So we intend to build the CPD by answering the following question:

Are the strategies and policies in place in your institution written clearly as a document, a separate quality assurance plan, school curricula, or some other strategic document?

For **Quality Assurance of Work-based Learning**, a list of what falls under work-based learning will be presented together with a Toolkit, with the aim of sharing good practices in quality assurance. The CPD programme will outline the before, during and after stages of work-based learning. For example, in the before stage, good examples can be provided of how work is done to attract industry to take up students for placements as well as the administrative work required in the planning phase. In the next phase, the programme can cover the requirement for supervision, assessment and the associated administration work. The types of documentation required in the final phase can also be included. All these aspects will be supplemented by case studies from various countries in order to give examples of good practice on a Europe-wide basis.

For **Maintaining and Continuously Improving QA System in VET Institutions**, the following quality areas shall be touched upon in separate short webinars with PowerPoint presentations and case studies.

The quality areas are:

- Mission and strategic Management
- Governance, organisational structure and administration
- Quality Management
- Integrity, accountability, and information management
- Teaching and administrative staff
- Design, monitoring and review programmes
- Student centred learning, teaching and assessment
- Student administration and student support services
- Learning resources and facilities
- Research, development, and/or other creative activity
- Institutional cooperation, service to society and Internationalisation.

For **Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials**, the CPD will cover the European approach, taking into account the different terminology used, such as in Malta, where they are known as awards and describing what is required to quality assure them. Micro-credentials have different markets, and this will be touched upon. This quality area will deal with the definition of micro-credentials and the reasons to offer them. Several case studies from around Europe will be part of this area.

For **Innovation in Teaching and Learning**, the CPD will include a digital profile of what can be provided nowadays, including the use of Artificial Intelligence. Some participants also suggested the inclusion of an example of a Policy and Procedure on Artificial Intelligence, which will be included with the Strategy and policies.

This topic will include online pedagogical approaches including blended learning, synchronous, asynchronous methods along with formative and summative assessments. It will also include material on how to engage students, the technology used online, activities to be carried out in class and out of class, type of quizzes available and usage of applications such as Google Classroom, Moodle and Teams.

For **Internationalisation**, the CPD will explore how internationalisation can apply both to institutions and to programmes. It will also show how internationalisation can enhance the reputation of the Institution and provide service to a global world. This topic will also cover the challenges faced by foreign students at the application stage as well as during their studies.

For **Synergies between ESG and EQAVET**, the CPD will map them together, wherever possible. Since this will benefit a limited number of countries, such as Malta and Estonia, these countries can contribute case studies.

All of the observations listed were expressed during the focus groups, in which all participants contributed widely to what they would like to learn from this CPD.

Nino Buic and Gino Schiavone have co-ordinated these Focus groups along with MFHEA in order to get as much feedback as possible in order to create a CPD that is valuable. The CPD will be available on a specific website.