



POLICY BRIEF

Peer
Learning
Activity on

Promoting Visibility and Rising Awareness of VET Processes

Participating countries: AT, EL, FI, HR, IT, LV, RO, SI

SUMMARY

This policy brief has been prepared in order to share the results of a Peer Learning Activity on Promoting Visibility and Rising Awareness of VET Processes. The peer learning activities provide a means of discussing, sharing and learning from each other on areas of strategic importance for the successful implementation of the Recommendation on establishing a European quality assurance reference framework for VET. The policy brief reflects the opinions of those who participated in the peer learning activity and does not constitute an official European Commission, specific Member States or EQAVET position.

This policy note is based on the peer learning activity (PLA) organized by the Romanian National Centre for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (which ensures the secretariat of the Romanian Quality Assurance National Reference Point – QANRP), and is co-financed by the European Commission (within the restricted call for the QANRPs – EACEA 46/2015). The PLA, brought together representatives of QANRPs, VET providers, government agencies and those with a national or regional responsibility for VET policy from 8 countries.

The methodology used provided opportunities for participants to share knowledge and experiences using examples of practice and/or policy implementation. This provides a starting point to reflect on how to address some of the shared challenges faced by education and training systems across the EU. This PLA focused on the ways the participating Member States promote visibility and awareness rising regarding VET processes. The following comments are based on the participants' reflections, which were informed by presentations from all participating countries.

This policy brief is not a verbatim report; instead it is an analysis of the issues that were felt to be important in an EQAVET context, considering how to increase visibility and awareness of VET, in the context of EU and national education and training policies and reforms. The PLA was informed by a background paper and an analysis of a questionnaire based on participants' experiences in this regard. More information on this PLA (programme, Background paper and presentations) is available on the Romanian QANRP web-site [here](#).

POLICY CONTEXT

The European Quality Assurance for VET Framework (EQAVET Framework) was set out in the 2009 Recommendation from the European Parliament and Council. It builds on the earlier work at a European level, in order to enhance European cooperation in vocational education and training, by developing and using of a Common Quality Assurance Framework.

The EQAVET Recommendation invited Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement in their VET systems, through the use of a quality assurance (QA) and improvement cycle. EQAVET is a Framework that allows individual Member States to develop their own arrangements which meet their requirements, in order to reform, in a convergent way, their quality assurance systems. EQAVET can be used to address challenges outlined in the Education and Training strategic framework 2020, the lifelong learning (LLL) programme proposed by the European Commission (Erasmus + which has streamlined the current EU programmes for education, training, youth and sport) and the 'Rethinking Education' communication in 2012. The Bucharest PLA addresses one of the main challenges mentioned in these documents – namely, making VET more attractive.

The "Visibility" of VET and "Raising awareness" regarding VET are concepts extensively discussed at European and wider international levels. After scanning different initiatives and documents, we introduced, as discussion topics in this

regard, six dimensions regarding visibility and raising awareness (all defined and explained in the Background Paper prepared for this PLA):

- The attractiveness of VET, itself.
- Transferability or permeability of VET,
- The national and transnational mobility in VET.
- The stakeholders' involvement.
- The "transitions" – mainly, school-to-work transition.
- The international cooperation in VET and, in this context, the role of the QANRPs in this regard.

Peer Learning Activity OBJECTIVES and METHODOLOGY

This EQAVET Peer Learning Activity (PLA) focussed on identifying the factors which may increase the visibility of VET and the awareness of all stakeholders regarding the importance of VET.

The PLA was organised around the six topics described above, as issued from relevant literature, and of **nine presentations** (case studies) proposed by the participants from seven Member States: Austria, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Slovenia.

In order to avoid boredom, the case study introducing the topic lasted no longer than 20 minutes, in order to give more time for reflection and interaction among participants.

For the same reason, the methodology used was different from a session to another (for instance, different group work techniques - such as brainstorming, "snowball" groups, "*tour de galerie*", "coffee tables" etc).

For each of the six dimensions mentioned above, the participants were asked to bring their own experiences, to share best practices, problems and solutions for these problems. In order to ignite reflection, each of the 6 topics will have, as "starters", several adjacent questions:

- In order to increase **VET attractiveness**: Why is VET unattractive, for individuals, in some countries and attractive in others? What kind of programmes and measures may increase VET attractiveness for individuals? How companies may be encouraged to give VET a higher value? What public authorities and/or regulators may do in this respect, in order to make VET more visible?
- In order to increase **permeability in VET**: Which competencies ensure a higher permeability in VET? Which is the role of key competencies in ensuring permeability of VET? What public authorities and/or regulators may do in this respect, in order to make VET more visible?
- In order to increase **national and transnational mobility** in VET: Which competencies ensure a higher national mobility in VET? Which competencies ensure a higher international mobility in VET? Are there sectors with higher mobility than others? What factors ensure higher mobility in VET at national and/or international level?
- In order to ensure **involvement and participation of stakeholders**: How employers' unions and trade unions may be motivated to ensure a higher visibility of VET? What kind of participation is suitable for social partners? In policy making? In curriculum development? In assessment and certification? Other ways of participation? What other stakeholders may be involved, in order to increase VET visibility?
- In order to **ensure school to work and work to school transition in VET**: Which are the most effective ways of induction (school-to-work transition)? Who are the main actors in this process? What circumstances may require "work-to-school" transitions?
- In order to enhance **international cooperation** in VET and to build effective networks: How VET may become more attractive using national and international networking? Which is the role of the QANRPs in establishing and developing networks? How to enhance cooperation among QANRPs? What EQAVET Network may do in this regard?

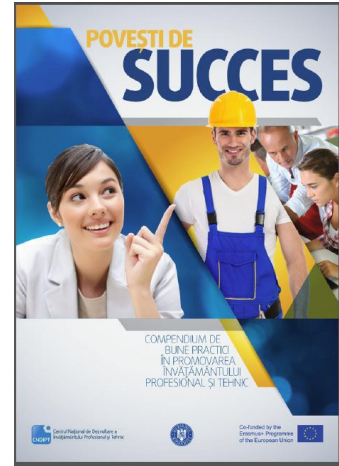
CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented at the PLA highlighted that there are some different QA approaches regarding VET awareness and visibility, but, on the other hand, there are also similar ones. The QA approaches were described in the presentations of the case studies.

The [Romanian](#) presentation highlighted the main objectives of the QANRP Project:

- Collecting and disseminating good practice, at both, European and national level, on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET.
- Raising the level of awareness of all stakeholders on the benefits of VET and on the central role of quality assurance in VET, via the project website, the database of relevant materials and via the information session.
- Disseminating, via the project website, the database of relevant materials and via the information session, the policies and instruments elaborated within EQAVET and by the project

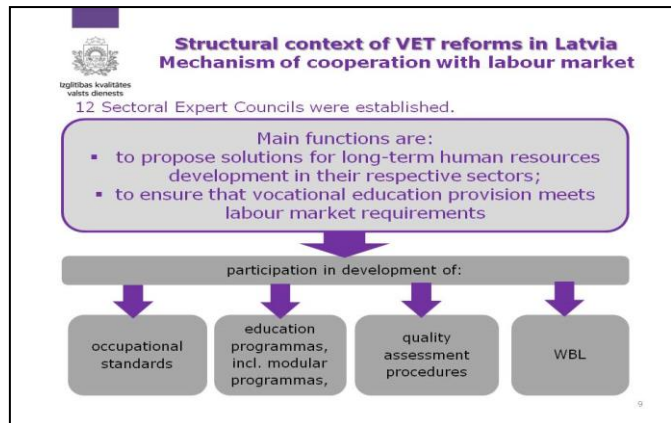
The presentation also highlighted the importance of some promotional materials involving stakeholders. Successful VET graduates or companies offering work base learning are the essence of the **Compendium of best practices** in VET promotion, named "[Successful Stories](#)" (a result of the same Romanian QANRP project, financed via the Restricted call)



The presentation from [Croatia](#) highlighted the importance of some factors regarding VET attractiveness, namely the **strategic** dimension of VET (i.e. embedding the attractiveness issues into the overall VET reform), the “smart” use of resources (mainly of EU funds) and, nevertheless, the need to adapt the EU or national policies to the specific contexts – regional and local.

The same, the subjective nature of attractiveness (“the eye of the beholder”) and other factors and characteristics with impact on attractiveness (such as relevance of IVET programmes to the labour market, quality assurance, recognised qualifications etc.) are, as well, important

The colleagues from [Latvia](#) discussed the importance of stakeholders’ partnership structures, such as “Sectoral Councils” – existing, in different shapes, in several other VET Systems. In this way, the qualifications offered by VET providers are both relevant (for the labour market) and attractive – not only for the trainees, but also for employers. The Latvian colleagues underlined, as well, the importance of attractiveness as a strategic dimension of the overall VET reform and of allocating specific (and substantial) resources for this purpose



The second [Romanian](#) presentation described a genuine experience (of a powerful and relevant employer), regarding making VET more visible and attractive.

The involvement of the company might take different forms - partnerships with VET providers for the qualifications the employer needs, summer camps, national skills contests, “VET Gala” and other social events.

Raising VETY attractiveness is one of the aims of the Company CSR Programme named “Skilful Romania”.



The case from [Austria](#) encompassed the national dimension, but also the local one (by presenting a very successful story of cooperation between employers and VET providers). The presentation raised new important issues regarding VET attractiveness - history and tradition. If VET become, historically and culturally, attractive (this case being Austria) there are fewer problems regarding VET attractiveness: all stakeholders value VET. The Austrian colleagues underlined, as well, the ideas of flexibility (among different pathways) and the need of a broader scope of VET “from safety net to high level technical raining”.

The presentation from [Slovenia](#) had, as its main topic, a web tool designed to link VET providers, employers and VET students and aimed, consequently, to increase trust in VET, to make VET more visible and to make people more aware regarding the benefits of VET.

Another idea issued from this presentation is that awareness raising programs might target the school level (by “technical days”, visits of VET students in primary schools, educational fairs, employment fairs, trade fairs etc.) but also the national level (for instance, by considering VET Promotion as a part of career guidance activities for students, teachers, councillors, headmasters etc.).



The [Finnish](#) presentation offered an example regarding a different way to promote VET as an attractive option, ensuring, as well, a smooth school-to-work transition and the relevant stakeholders’ involvement. The Skills Competition, with tradition in Finland, has several objectives, aiming not only VET students (developing their skills, becoming aware of the needs of the labour market, developing communication, cooperation and other “transversal” skills), but also teachers (opportunities for networking and for improving their professional skills), employers (increasing recruitment opportunities and cooperation between companies and educational institutions) and the general public (by promoting professional excellence and valuing different qualifications).

The presentation of the colleague from [Greece](#) was focused on the role of the work based learning (apprenticeship) as a privileged way not only to make VET more attractive, but also to consolidate the link between school and employer. The recent VET reform in Greece has, as one of its main aims, introducing the VET “dual system” and apprenticeship schemes. This system helps to avoid early specialization of students and provides solid general knowledge necessary for the formation of the horizontal or transversal skills.

The new Apprenticeship System

- The cornerstone of the new Apprenticeship System is the introduction of the optional Post-secondary year - Apprenticeship Class. The Apprenticeship Class belongs to the non-formal educational system and allows EPAL graduates (formal secondary vocational education), as well as former TEE graduates (EPAL equivalent) to participate in a one year apprenticeship.
- This new system is to be established as of the 2016-7 school year, implemented by the Ministry of Education, while altogether EPAL, EK and OAED (through KPA) become responsible for placing students at work.

www.eoppep.gr



The last presentation was from [Romania](#) too, and was supposed to boost the discussion on international cooperation in VET by discussing the opportunities offered by the “Erasmus+” programme. Being held by a representative of the Romanian Agency for Community Programmes (managing “Erasmus+” funds), the presentation offered some hints regarding what might be considered a good applications and a good project management, with dissemination and sustainability as main issues.

DISCUSSION, REFLECTION and POLICY ISSUES

All nine case studies highlighted that **the visibility and attractiveness are relevant issues for almost all VET systems**. However, there are differences in approaching these issues, mainly regarding the ways this goal (making VET more attractive) is tackled. There are, as well, differences among the national VET systems, regarding their history, culture and traditions. Due to this diversity, the PLA served as an environment for sharing different practices and concerns and learning from each other experiences and challenges encountered.

The participants agreed some **key elements** which need to be considered in order to increase VET visibility and to raise public awareness regarding VET:

- “It’s all about teachers” - the constant need to improve the quality of human resources - mainly of teachers and trainers, but also of councillors, coaches, managers / principals etc.: recruitment, training (in-service, including solving pre-service training issues), (re)connection with the industry (for instance, teacher stages in companies and company experts as support teachers), motivating teachers (including financially) etc.
- Embracing a strategic vision regarding “a more attractive VET” and embedding this dimension in all reform programmes in VET (such as creating quality assurance mechanisms, developing curriculum, devising professional / occupational standards, introducing work based learning etc.).
- Improving the quality of VET infrastructure – workshops, laboratories etc. – and using the EU initiatives and programmes. “Smart” use of the financial resources – including from European Social Fund and from the Erasmus+ Programme – by avoiding an increase in bureaucratic burden.
- Promoting “horizontal” cooperation among VET providers and employers, in order to provide relevant and consistent VET programmes, including for curriculum and qualifications development.
- Supporting and promoting true leaders – e.g. the headmasters/principals of successful VET schools.
- Preserving a close and constant relationship with the labour market needs (present and forecasted) and ensuring high levels of employability for VET graduates. A privileged way may be, in this respect, creating opportunities for work based learning (via dual systems, apprenticeship schemes or in other ways).
- Ensuring constant (and positive) presence of VET in mass media. Devising promotion campaigns and organizing promotion events – not only “big conferences” at national or international level, but also workshops or seminars at local and regional levels.
- Increasing permeability - to higher education, but also offering other “transition paths” for VET graduates. Avoiding “dead ends”.
- Ensuring national and transnational mobility for VET students and, generally, not forgetting that the students are the main targets for promotion programmes.
- Broaden the scope of VET: safety and health rules, key competencies etc.
- Publicising (on paper and electronically) success stories – e.g. “Compendiums of QANRPs Best Practices”. In this regard, collecting individual and very personal stories (“sparks from the field”), might be useful.
- Multiplying common programmes and activities, involving stakeholders – including “extracurricular” activities.
- Common projects and training activities with participants invited from different stakeholder areas.
- Organizing field trips in order to visit successful VET providers and employers involved in work based learning and to discuss with successful individuals (VET graduates or students).
- Promoting feedback “readiness” and “openness” for feedback among all relevant stakeholders.

In order to **enhance cooperation among QANRPs**, the participants suggested as possible initiatives (besides the existing ones – PLAs, study visits, working groups etc.):

- Supporting the less active QANRPs (for instance, the ones who choose not to apply for this restricted call) by the most active one, until a “critical mass” of active and visible QANRPs is reached.

- Short time and “technical” oriented study visits (small group or individual), from a QANRP to another, in order to observe how a specific and concrete issue is tackled. This kind of mobility may be introduced as an eligible activity in the next restricted call.
- Job rotation for VET teachers and trainers (including international).
- Enhancing cooperation and communication via EQAVET website (on public sections, but also on the section visible only for NRPs).
- Common training activities, organized by the National Agencies dealing with Erasmus+ Programme.
- Joint planning of the QANRPs activity – further steps and activities planned as joint ventures – including joint research projects.
- Peer review / peer-evaluation among QANRPs and external evaluation – an intensely debated point – but avoiding criticism that might be taken personally.

SOME CONCLUSIONS regarding the PLA

In order to measure the effectiveness of the PLA organized by the Romanian QANRP, the participants were asked to answer to [a post-activity questionnaire](#).

This questionnaire aimed, on one hand, to see the measure this PLA was useful for participants and, on the other hand, to get feedback to the organizers.

In this respect:

78% from the participants considered that this PLA met their professional and personal expectations. The reasons for these answers: ” We were productive and also having very good time”; “I consider that it offered an extremely diverse range of examples on making VET more attractive”; “The interventions were relevant, objective and even critical to the extent of the VET development status in EU countries”; “PLA promote information sharing among the states, but for better result there must be deeper discussions in each theme”. There was some criticism, as well – regarding the second day, considered having some interventions less relevant for the topic.

The participants intend to valorise the results of this PLA in several ways: seeking and publicising “success stories”; sharing the information within the institution and with other stakeholders; making new partnerships and developing new projects; taking over and adapting some of the ideas presented during the PLA.

All participants were “very satisfied” (between 55% and 78%) and “rather satisfied” (the remaining) regarding most of the aspects considered (the communication before conference, the input materials, the presentations during the PLA, the communication among participants, the field trip, the equipment used, the accommodation and catering services and the extracurricular activities). Only regarding one aspect – the proportion between plenary and group activities 22% from the participants were rather unsatisfied. The need for more work group was indicated as the main motif for this option.

For organizers, besides positive reviews and encouragements to continue such activities, the participants recommended to ensure more opportunities and time for each participants to express his/hers opinions (one participant) and to involve more social partners for presentations and discussions (one participant).

As a conclusion and as the main lesson learnt, we consider that PLAs should be considered fruitful experiences, for all participants, but only if they ensure relevant topics, involvement of different stakeholders and more time for individual and group work.