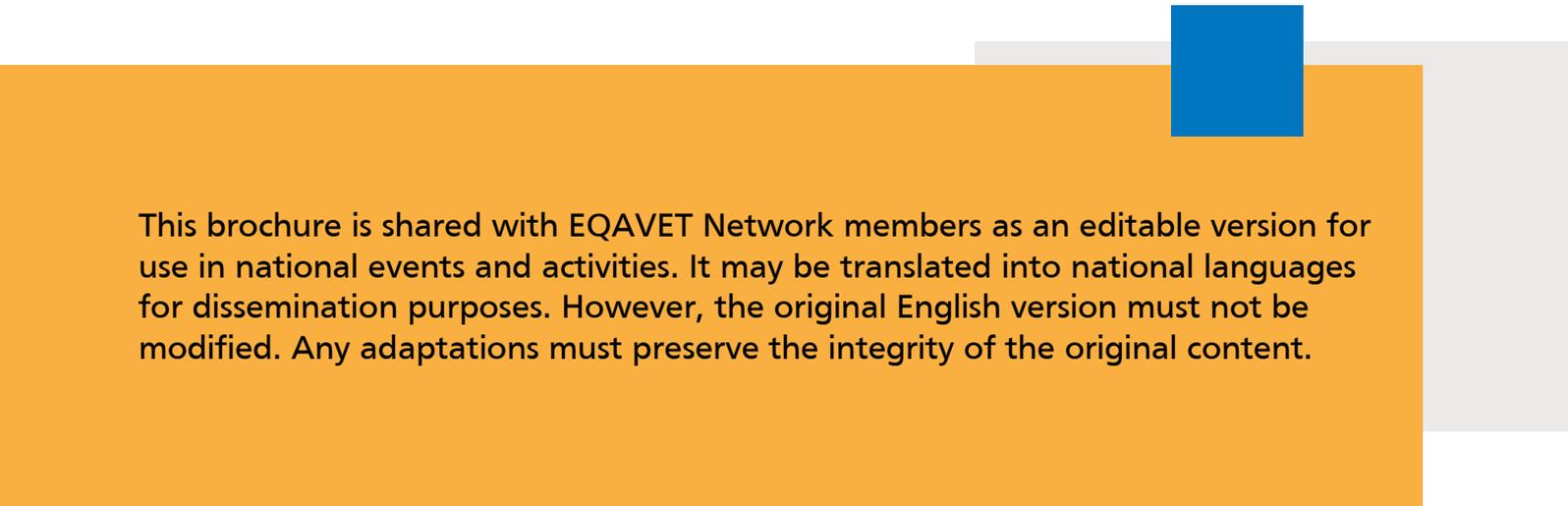# European Reference Framework for quality assurance in vocational education and training

Improving Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training across Europe through common principles of quality management

October 2025

This brochure is shared with EQAVET Network members as an editable version for use in national events and activities. It may be translated into national languages for dissemination purposes. However, the original English version must not be modified. Any adaptations must preserve the integrity of the original content.

Introduction

Welcome to the European Reference Framework for quality assurance in vocational education and training (EQAVET), your gateway to supporting excellence in Vocational Education and Training (VET) across the EU. Established by the 2009 recommendation of the European Parliament and Council, EQAVET stands as a comprehensive reference framework supporting quality assurance in VET across Europe.

EQAVET identity

The EQAVET reference framework was launched in 2009 as a versatile tool to guide quality assurance and continuous improvement cycles within European VET systems and providers. Aligned with the 2020 EU Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience, EQAVET stands as a cornerstone for enhancing the quality assurance of VET across Europe. Its versatility allows for the assessment and improvement of learning environments, regardless of their format be it school-based, work-based, or blended learning. Rather than imposing rigid standards, EQAVET functions as a dynamic 'toolbox,' from which users can select what's most relevant to their unique contexts and needs. This approach respects the diverse methodologies employed by Member States, preserving the richness of their educational approaches, and encouraging them to exchange good practices and organise mutual learning activities.

EQAVET doesn't set out a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, EQAVET embodies a quality assurance and improvement cycle—planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision— echoing the renowned Deming Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act). This cycle is applicable across various learning contexts of VET, including initial and continuing education, non-formal and informal learning, apprenticeships, work-based learning, etc. It can also be used for many other quality assurance processes e.g. curriculum development and provider accreditation processes. etc. Whether a country or region seeks to enhance the design of vocational qualifications, bolster online learning initiatives, or refine accreditation systems, EQAVET provides a structured yet adaptable reference framework for continuous quality improvement.

Continuous Quality Improvement Based on a Quality Assurance Cycle

Reference Indicators and Indicative descriptors

National Implementation

System and Provider Level Implementation

Flexibility in Member States' Quality Assurance Journey

Applicable Across VET Domains

EQAVET key principles

The EQAVET framework is based on six
key principles:

**Continuous Quality Improvement
Based on a Quality Assurance Cycle**

Reference Indicators and
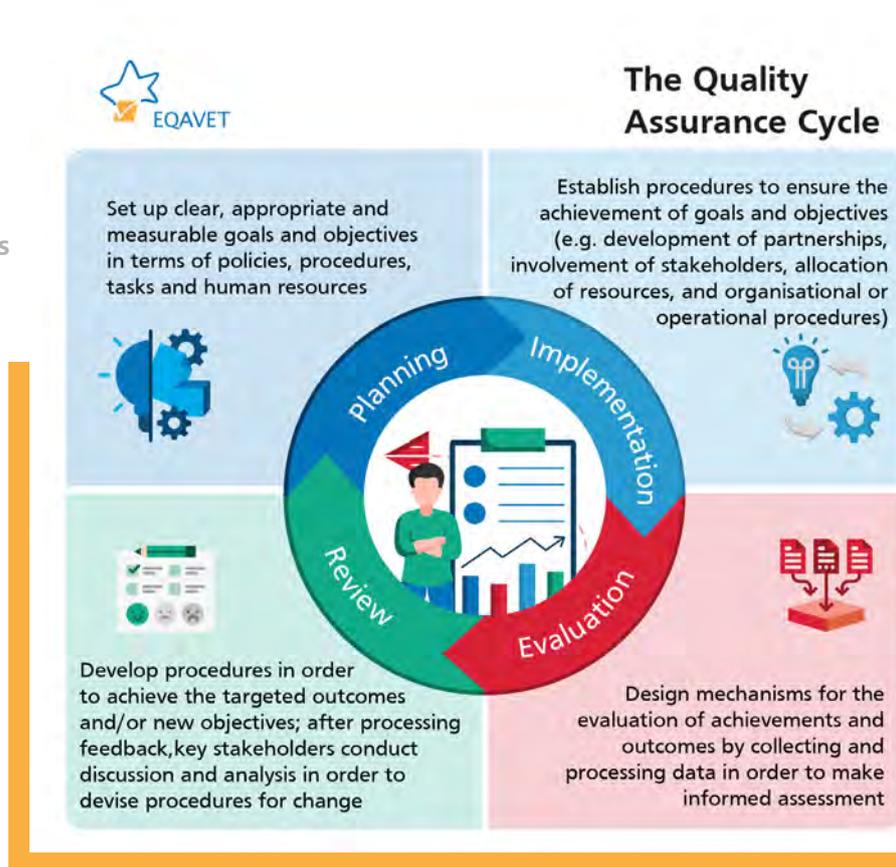Indicative descriptors

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**Continuous Quality Improvement Based on a
Quality Assurance Cycle:** EQAVET is rooted in the
philosophy of continuous improvement and the four
phases of the quality cycle - planning, implementation,
evaluation, and review - serve as a cornerstone for
quality assurance at both the VET system and provider
levels. The EQAVET reference framework incorporates
a series of indicators and indicative descriptors to
guide the evaluation and improvement of national/
regional VET systems. Relevance of quality assurance
systems for VET providers.

The Quality Assurance Cycle

Set up clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources

Establish procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives (e.g. development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational or operational procedures)

Develop procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives; after processing feedback, key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis in order to devise procedures for change

Design mechanisms for the evaluation of achievements and outcomes by collecting and processing data in order to make informed assessment

Planning — Implementation — Evaluation — Review

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Reference Indicators and Indicative descriptors: Ten reference indicators measure critical aspects of VET quality:

1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers

2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers

3. Participation rate in VET programmes

4. Completion rate in VET programmes

5. Placement rate of graduates from VET programmes

6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace

7. Unemployment rate in the country

8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups

9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market

10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET and provide guidance to (potential) VET learners

These indicators not only serve as invaluable tools for measuring the quality of provision at both system and provider levels, but also foster transparency, consistency and comparability across different formats of VET in a country or region, and across Europe.

The EQAVET indicative descriptors offer insights into the quality assurance process as they provide a basis for EQAVET users to reflect on the goals and priorities of their own quality assurance approaches. Specific indicative descriptors are associated with each phase of the quality cycle. Regardless of where the quality assurance journey begins, using all four phases of the cycle is the basis for achieving high-quality VET. This approach ensures a systematic and comprehensive evaluation of VET provision, driving continuing improvement and adaptation to evolving needs of the labour market and learners.

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National Implementation: Since its inception in 2009, Member States have used the EQAVET cycle, indicators, and indicative descriptors to strengthen a diverse range of national, regional, or local quality assurance processes tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. National Quality Assurance Reference Points (NRPs) serve as focal points, bringing together relevant stakeholders at both national and regional levels. Their primary objectives include:

1. Implementing and advancing the EQAVET Framework to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

2. Mobilising a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to actively contribute to EQAVET's implementation.

3. Supporting self-evaluation practices as a means to measure success and pinpoint areas for enhancement, such as assessing the digital readiness of VET systems and institutions.

4. Actively participating in the European EQAVET Network to exchange best practice and foster collaboration.

5. Providing up-to-date descriptions of national quality assurance arrangements and their alignment with EQAVET principles.

6. Engaging in EU-level peer reviews to promote transparency and consistency in quality assurance practices, thereby strengthening mutual trust among Member States.

At the heart of the European EQAVET Network, NRPs, national representatives from Ministries and other relevant bodies exchange knowledge and experiences and collaborate closely across Europe. Through collective efforts, the EQAVET Network generates valuable insights, case studies, and guidance on diverse methodologies for developing and enhancing the quality assurance of VET. To further support this endeavour, the EQAVET Network hosts various opportunities for mutual learning throughout the year, including peer learning activities and an annual meeting. These are aimed at engaging stakeholders with an interest in European-level VET quality assurance.

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System and Provider Level Implementation: The EQAVET Framework has been instrumental in shaping both the quality assurance arrangements at national or regional policy level as well as at the level of individual (or groups of) VET schools and providers, both from the public and the private sector.

At the system level, national and regional policy makers and other VET-stakeholders can use the EQAVET indicative descriptors to reflect on the focus of their quality assurance arrangements, track progress over time and assess the effectiveness, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of their quality assurance approach. For instance, during the review phase of the quality assurance cycle, stakeholders may reflect on contrasting statements related to specific indicative descriptors, such as whether all stakeholders understand and agree on review procedures, or if there is a lack of clarity in this regard. This reflective exercise aids in identifying areas for system-level enhancements and improvements.

Furthermore, stakeholders are invited to select and use the EQAVET reference indicators. When standardised indicators are used in different learning contexts, it is easier to collate and analyse relevant data to provide valuable quality assurance insights at the system level.

At the level of VET providers, the use of the EQAVET Framework varies in different regional and national systems. This use is often based on factors such as autonomy, flexibility, support, and funding. Reflective of this diversity, VET providers can also use contrasting statement for the indicative descriptors to assess their quality assurance approach. Each pair of considering contrasting statements can help VET providers to identify areas for refinement and advancement. For instance, in the implementation phase of the quality assurance cycle, providers may reflect on whether resources are effectively aligned with their implementation plans or if there is a misalignment when compared to the targets that have been set.

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Flexibility in Member States' Quality Assurance Journey: EQAVET operates on the premise of flexibility, recognising that one size does not fit all when it comes to quality assurance in VET. EQAVET offers a versatile framework built on common principles, indicative descriptors, and indicators. Think of it as your customised 'toolbox,' which equips you with the tools to assess and evaluate the quality of VET systems and providers according to your context and in line with your needs.

Member States have embraced this flexibility, building on the EQAVET cycle, indicators, and indicative descriptors to develop diverse quality assurance approaches tailored to their specific circumstances.

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Applicable Across VET Domains: The EQAVET Framework exhibits remarkable versatility, catering to the diverse landscapes of VET. It supports a wide spectrum of learning environments, including school-based, work-based, formal, informal, and non-formal settings. Moreover, it adapts to different learning contexts, whether they be digital, face-to-face, or blended approaches. This versatility ensures that the EQAVET Framework is applicable to both public and private sector VET providers, facilitating the enhancement of quality assurance practices across various domains of VET.

EQAVET governance

Governance   Steering Committee   National Reference
                                                                        Points
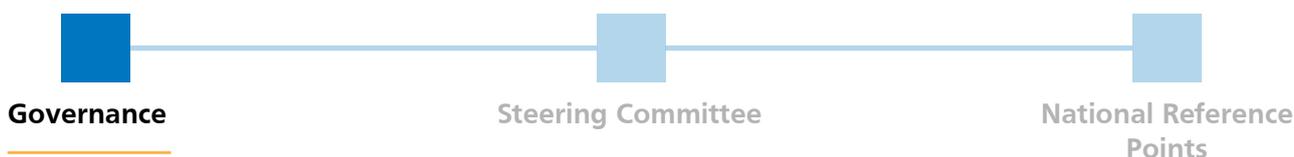
The EQAVET Network is led by the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), with support from the EQAVET Secretariat. This governance structure ensures the coordination and alignment of activity at the European level, facilitating the achievement of EQAVET's objectives. Operating on a 'bottom-up' approach, the EQAVET Network actively involves EQAVET National Reference Points (EQAVET NRPs) and national representatives from Ministries and other relevant bodies. Through this collaborative model, the EQAVET Network cultivates an environment conducive to mutual learning and exchange of best practice. By tapping into the diverse expertise and experiences of its members, the network harnesses collective wisdom to address common challenges and drive continuing improvement in VET quality assurance across the EU. Furthermore, the involvement of EQAVET NRPs and national representatives ensures that decisions and initiatives are grounded in the realities and priorities of Member States. This decentralised approach enables tailored solutions that are responsive to the unique contexts and needs of different national and regional VET systems. Overall, the governance structure of the EQAVET Network serves as a robust foundation for its work, facilitating collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action towards enhancing the quality assurance of vocational education and training across Europe.

EQAVET governance

Governance   **Steering Committee**   National Reference Points

The EQAVET Steering Committee plays a pivotal role in guiding the strategic direction and coordination of EQAVET's activities. Comprising elected EQAVET Network members and key European stakeholders, the Steering Committee collaborates closely with the European Commission and the European Secretariat for EQAVET.

Since its establishment in 2009, the Steering Committee has met twice a year to provide valuable insights and advice on a range of matters. These meetings serve as platforms for discussing national and regional policy needs, and ensuring that EQAVET's initiatives are aligned with the evolving landscape of VET across Member States. In addition to offering advice on ongoing activities, the Steering Committee plays a crucial role in contextualising policy developments within the unique contexts of Member States. By providing feedback and insights from their respective practice, committee members contribute to the formulation of coherent and responsive policies that address the diverse needs of the VET sector. Moreover, the Steering Committee facilitates appropriate coordination and strategic development within EQAVET, ensuring synergy with other relevant VET policy areas and processes. This collaborative approach fosters alignment with broader European agendas for VET and enhances the effectiveness of EQAVET's efforts in promoting VET quality assurance.

Overall, the governance structure of the EQAVET Steering Committee promotes an environment of collaboration, mutual learning, and strategic development, serving as a cornerstone of the EQAVET network's success.

EQAVET governance

Governance   Steering Committee   National Reference Points

The EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) carry out various activities to promote and improve quality assurance in VET in their respective countries/regions. Their activities are based on the EQAVET principles which provide a European-wide reference framework for quality assurance in VET. Examples of activities organised by NRPs include:

- **Mutual learning workshops and conferences** to discuss quality assurance in VET, share best practice (e.g. between autonomous regions in a country), and update national stakeholders on the latest developments.

- **Capacity building workshops** and training sessions for VET providers and their staff (school leadership, teachers and administrators) on quality assurance processes.

- **Stakeholder engagement activities** e.g. meetings with stakeholders including employers, VET providers, and learners to gather feedback and promote quality improvements.

- **Collaboration with Industry,** working closely with sector organisations to better align VET programmes with labour market needs and quality requirements.

- **Developing national quality indicators:** based on the EQAVET quality indicators and indicative descriptors to help VET institutions and VET systems measure their performance.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** raising awareness about the importance of quality assurance in VET through media campaigns and informational sessions.

- **Developing labels and certification programmes for** VET providers and other VET stakeholders to ensure they meet national and European quality standards.

- **Conducting research studies and publishing reports** on questions related to VET quality assurance.

- **Creating guides, toolkits, and other resources** to support VET institutions in improving their quality assurance practices.

EQAVET in practice

How countries have used EQAVET to improve quality assurance in VET: The EQAVET Reference Framework helps Member States to further the quality assurance of their VET systems and VET providers in the public and private sector, including:

■ the different VET-specific learning environments (e.g., school-based provision, work-based learning, apprenticeships, etc.),

■ various learning formats (e.g., digital, face-to-face and blended),

■ the different types of learning (formal, informal and non-formal), and

■ VET awards and qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.

Through their National Reference Points, Member States are working on developing tailored quality assurance systems and approaches using elements of the EQAVET reference framework. A survey from 2022 revealed that the EQAVET Framework continues to be widely adopted in national quality assurance systems. Of the 28 countries surveyed, 24 used the EQAVET quality cycle, 19 used EQAVET indicative descriptors, and 21 used EQAVET indicators.

In Austria, QMS (Quality Management System for Schools) – is in place since 2021 for the school-based part of VET. QMS focusses on teaching and learning processes, ensuring high-quality in teaching and learning. Based on the EQAVET quality cycle, the QMS helps to make sure that any action is well planned, thoroughly exercised, evaluated and – if necessary - leads to improved actions.

Continuous improvement and quality management are a key priority for VET in Finland. Key objectives of the Finnish national quality strategy for VET 2030 include the establishment of a framework for quality management of VET and its various actors and stakeholders, based on EQAVET principles. VET providers' quality assurance is based on the idea of continuous improvement, using tools such as self-assessment, peer review, and knowledge management.

In France, a new legislation on QA for VET providers in line with the EQAVET principles is in place since January 2022. Quality certification based on a National Quality Framework is ('Qualiopi'), is required for VET providers if their programmes are supported by public funding. The certification is completed by a third-party.

The quality assurance system of VET in Croatia has four levels:
1) Curriculum network and the network of VET providers,
2) Database for monitoring and system management,
3) Evaluation system and evaluation data gathering,
4) Stimulating and corrective measures.

An online tool supports VET providers with their self-assessment procedures, providing a common framework to measure success and identify areas for improvement, against established quality criteria, including the digital readiness of VET systems and institutions.

In Hungary, a quality management system (QMS) for formal VET institutions consists of the four main elements,
1) Quality policy, related to
2) Self-evaluation based on a self-evaluation guidebook,
3) VET teacher-trainer evaluation and
4) external evaluation.

The set of criteria and measuring tools to be applied for self-evaluation, external evaluation and teacher-trainer evaluation incorporate the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators.

The EQAVET Network:

The EQAVET Network has members from all of the 27 European Members States, four EFTA countries (Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Switzerland); and seven of the EU Candidate Countries or Potential Candidates (Albania, Turkey, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). 33 countries have established a Quality Assurance NRPs with various responsibilities, including networking for quality assurance and reporting, describing national quality assurance arrangements, and leading developments for implementing and enhancing the EQAVET Framework.

Agencies funded by ministries bare the most common hosts for NRPs. The webpage of the EQAVET National Reference Points has more info on their activities, including country factsheets, case studies and contact details.

🔵 **Website**

🟠 **Country Factsheet**

# The EQAVET Network's Mutual Learning Activities

Since its inception in 2009, the EQAVET Network has organised Peer Learning Activities each year, webinars and the Annual Network Meeting. Reports from those activities can be found in the EQAVET Virtual Library. In 2022 and 2023, the EQAVET Network carried out 21 peer reviews, where NRPs met to mutually review questions related to their national system level quality assurance measures. This proved to be a fruitful exercise with tangible outcomes, such as in the examples shown below

- The **Czech NRP**, in collaboration with national stakeholders, developed an action plan to link initial and continuing VET in order to enhance flexibility and permeability in learning pathways. The action plan was presented to the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport and integrated into the Czech Education Policy Strategy 2030+.

- The **Lithuanian NRP** created a digital platform dedicated to VET teachers. This allowed them to share resources, news and best practices with the VET community, to strengthen the teacher network and gradually build trust. The Lithuanian NRP also organised six workshops for VET teachers and trainers on methodological activities to encourage their participation in quality assurance

- The **Luxembourg NRP** worked on improving graduate tracking through data from learner pathways in the VET system, developing a quantitative pilot dataset, a pilot dashboard with indicators. They also organised consultations with employers' and employees' representatives on how to combine data from employer satisfaction surveys with existing graduate tracking data.

- The **Spanish NRP** established a working group with representatives from the 17 Spanish autonomous regions. This group, alongside an expert group, agreed a common set of quality indicators for the national quality model for VET.

Explore EQAVET

What Does EQAVET Mean in Your Country? Examples from...

- **Austria NRP:** "In September 2021, Austria implemented a new QA system in line with EQAVET: QMS (Qualitätsmanagementsystem für Schulen – www.qms.at) following more than three years of development. QMS is a single quality assurance system for vocational and general education in more than 5,000 schools."

- **German NRP:** "As a result of the EQAVET process, the German NRP (DEQA-VET) has for the first time published a brochure on the most important regulations, procedures and stakeholders involved in company-based training. It is aimed at education experts from science, politics and practice both in Germany and internationally. The publication is available in four languages (German, English, Spanish and Russian) (DEQA-VET / Publications and Downloads)."

- **Hungary NRP:** "A recent comprehensive reform of the Hungarian VET system has been implemented. This is in line with the objectives of the VET 4.0 medium-term policy strategy for the renewal of VET. in 2021 a national quality management system (QMS) was developed and is currently being implemented in all formal VET institutions. The QMS is based fully on the EQAVET Framework: the criteria and measuring tools used for comprehensive self-evaluation, external evaluation and the evaluation of the performance of VET teachers-trainers and institutional leaders. This system integrates the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators which are applicable at the VET provider level. The system aims is to improve the prestige, attractiveness, quality, and effectiveness of VET. It strengthens formal VET institution's ability to respond more efficiently to the changing demands of the labour market/economy. The reform will also support the creation of VET providers as learning organisations which continually and systematically pursue quality management and quality improvement."

- **Spain NRP:** "The 'Quality Assurance for the Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVES) in Spain' project, currently coordinated by EQAVET Spain, aims to provide tools for the implementation of the EQAVET quality model in VET centres. Specifically, this development of teaching materials will be carried out in partnership with the State Network of Vocational Training Centres of Excellence."
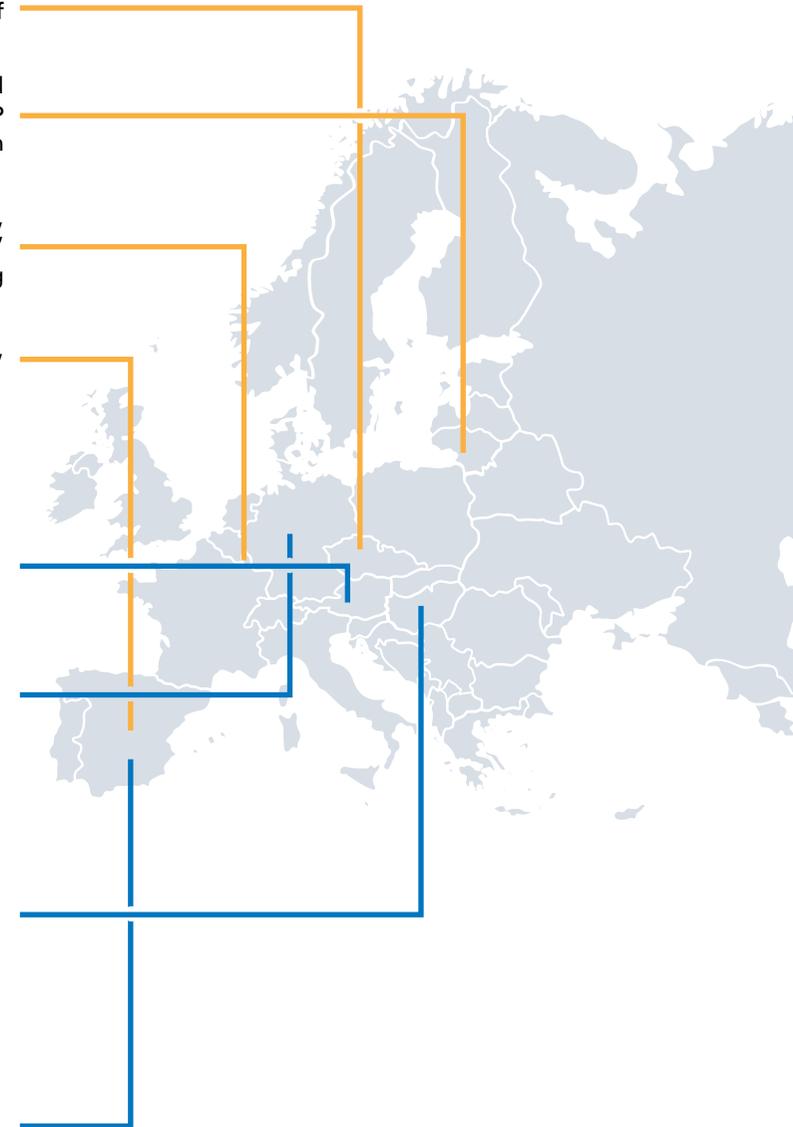
Knowledge Hub for Quality Assurance in VET

The EQAVET Webpages on the europa.eu website feature the EQAVET Virtual Library, a knowledge hub that contains 29 case studies, 28 country factsheets, 14 background papers related to peer learning activities, 14 reports from mutual learning activities (PLAs and Annual Network Meetings), 8 research studies, a webinar recording, a report from a working groups on quality assurance in adult learning, and much more.

Find Out More:

Explore case studies, read reports, and access country factsheets from the virtual library to learn how Member States are implementing the EQAVET framework through their National Reference Points.

- Subscribe to the EQAVET Newsletter for the latest updates
- Access valuable resources in the EQAVET virtual library
- Visit the EQAVET website to learn more