



# E-Mail-Newsletter

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## Quality Assurance in Higher VET



The three-year Erasmus+ project 'Promoting and Implementing Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education and Training' (QA HiVETnet), which started in September 2014, will come to an end at the end of August. With this 3<sup>rd</sup> Newsletter we would like to briefly summarise the background to our project and present the final results, which can be downloaded from the project website: <http://www.qa-hivet.net>.

### *Project background*

Despite the fact that today more and more people acquire higher qualifications, many EU Member States are recording **high unemployment rates** – also among university graduates. At the same time, many companies in the EU are complaining about **skilled labour shortage** and **job applicants lacking suitable skills and qualifications**. This has **negative effects** on the **companies' competitiveness**.

To tackle these challenges efficiently, education and training programmes need to be geared strongly towards the **specific qualification demand of companies**. Over the last years many Member States have thus started reforming their VET systems establishing company-based training programmes or integrating work-based learning in school-based programmes. These are, without any doubt, steps into the right direction. The reform efforts should however not be restricted to initial VET only. Particularly due to continually increasing requirements made by the labour market in terms of qualifications, more attention needs to be paid to **higher VET**, i.e. to qualifications allocated to those levels of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) which are referenced to the levels **5 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**.

However, the discourse on the topic of higher qualifications is almost exclusively limited to **tertiary academic education**, i.e. to qualifications acquired in scientific, research-oriented programmes at universities. This is a limited view because knowledge- and innovation-driven economies need not only graduates of academic education but also highly qualified skilled workers in their respective profession. They often form the productive backbone in the economy and play a crucial role in the transfer of research findings to marketable products and services. Therefore, it is necessary to establish higher VET as an **equal supplement** to tertiary academic education and recognise its value for the economy.

### *Higher VET*

Higher VET is a very **heterogeneous** education sector in Europe. Whereas tertiary academic qualifications follow a uniform structure (bachelor, masters, PhD) and have common quality standards, higher VET lacks these **"connecting brackets"** or unifying features. Therefore, there is no shared understanding of how higher VET is to be understood in either the EU or in the majority of European countries. As a result of the lack of a uniform **"umbrella brand"**, higher VET is considered less important in public perception than tertiary academic education and its qualifications are often less familiar. In order to create a higher level of awareness of the significance of higher VET, greater understanding and clarity is needed about what characteristics this sector has and which joint features, or "connecting brackets", there are. Such a "connecting bracket" is **quality assurance**.

### *Quality features*

It is precisely the intention of the **European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET**, the main product of QA HiVETnet, to create such a "connecting bracket". This publication presents the twelve **quality features** (QFs) which characterise higher VET as defined by in the QA HiVETnet project (cf. [2<sup>nd</sup> Newsletter](#)). In this way, it will be made transparent what higher VET programmes as well as qualifications are based on and what learners and employers can expect from these qualifications. The quality features can serve as guidance or reference points which stake-

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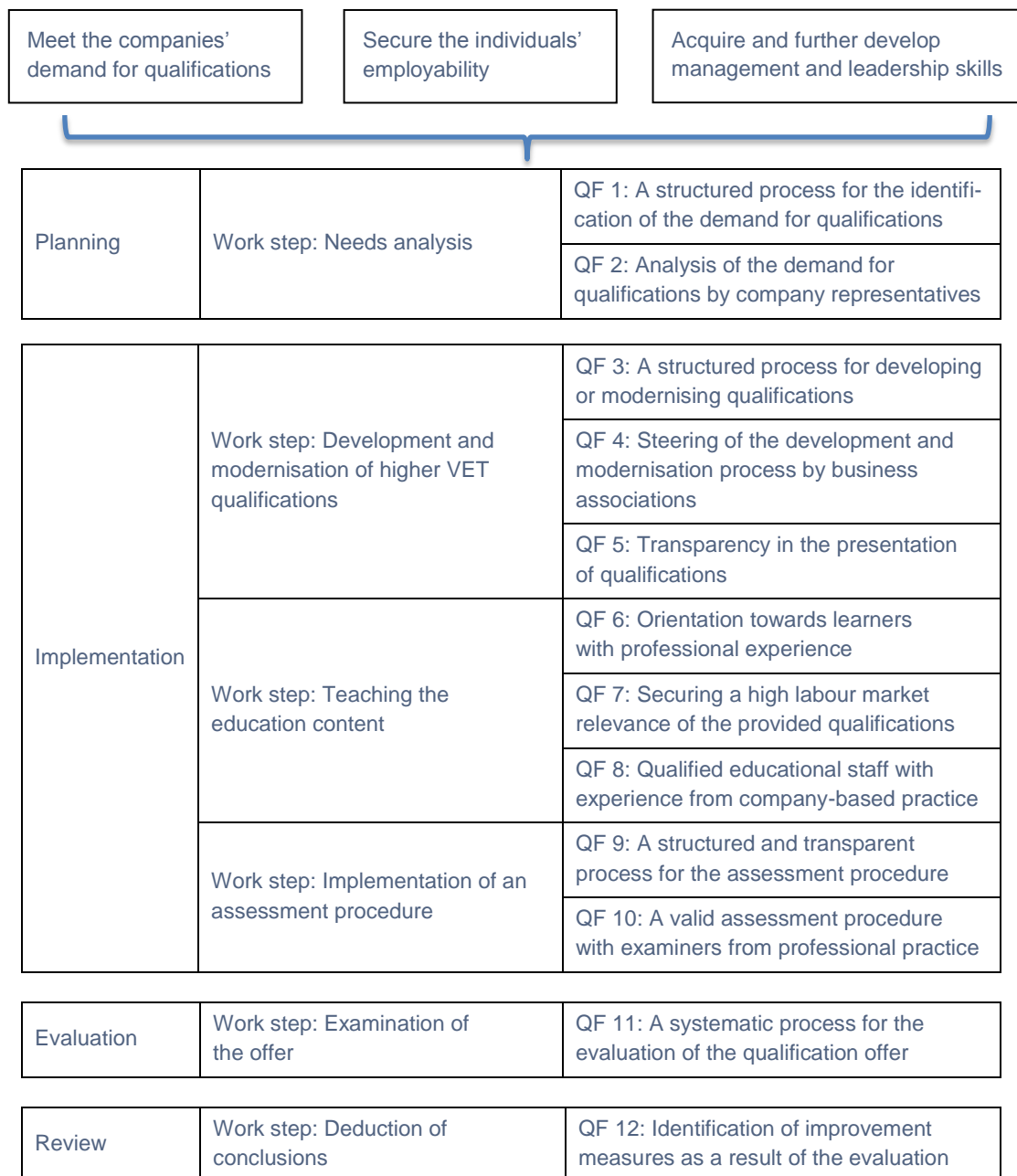
Common quality assurance guidelines can help create an "umbrella brand" for higher VET.

The twelve quality features which are derived from the three primary objectives of higher VET are allocated to the four phases of the 'lifecycle' of a qualification.

holders in higher VET can use to check their own quality assurance systems, mechanisms and instruments and improve them if necessary. Overall, the European Guidelines aim at encouraging a higher degree of transparency and better comparability of higher VET.

The basis for the **structured presentation** of the quality features in the European Guidelines is the quality assurance cycle as used in EQAVET, comprising the four phases of planning, implementation, evaluation and review. At the same time, these four phases portray the "lifecycle" of a qualification, along which the individual quality features are described. All quality features are connected to or respectively derived from the **three primary objectives of higher VET** (cf. [2<sup>nd</sup> Newsletter](#)).

Diagram 1: Structure of the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance of Higher VET



Source: European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET

Each quality feature is described in detail in the Guidelines. At the end, by way of summary, **three key points** which are at the core of quality assurance in higher VET are presented. These are:

1. **Ensuring proximity to the labour market:** Higher VET is demand-driven. One characteristic of the quality of higher VET is the involvement of representatives from professional practice in the entire "lifecycle" of a qualification – from the needs analysis to the implementation of measures aiming to improve the qualifications on offer.

(1) Proximity to the labour market, (2) economy-related governance structure and (3) transparency are at the heart of quality assurance in higher VET.

2. **Governance structure with close ties to the economy:** The close connection between companies and higher VET is also reflected in the governance structure. This is characterised by the institutional cooperation of organisations with close ties to the economy, such as chambers, professional associations and – depending on the context – social partners as well as responsible state authorities and ministries. This ensures that higher VET is geared towards the specific requirements of the companies and the labour market, both conceptually and in practical implementation (“qualifications from the economy, for the economy”).
3. **Safeguarding transparency:** Transparency creates awareness, awareness strengthens trust, trust leads to appreciation and recognition. To safeguard transparency it is important to structure all the processes and procedures throughout the “lifecycle” of a qualification and communicate information clearly.

### QA Network

On the occasion of the QA HiVETnet final conference the **European Network on Quality Assurance in Higher VET** was launched. Coordinated by UEAPME, this Network initially addresses the members of the UEAPME Training Committee; it is planned, however, that interested organisations and institutions outside of this committee can also become members in the future. It is the **goal** of this Network to promote the topic of higher VET at the European and national level, contribute expert knowledge on higher VET, further develop the European Guidelines, encourage their application and implementation and participate in the exchange and transfer of expert knowledge, experience and best practice examples. In order to become a member of the Network, a Declaration of Interest has to be filled in: [English](#) || [German](#).

### Final conference



The final QA HiVETnet conference with the title “**Qualifications We Need, Quality We Want**” took place in Brussels on 16 May 2017. More than 60 people from 15 different countries participated in this event. After some welcoming words by **Véronique Willems**, Secretary General of UEAPME, **Detlef Eckert**, the (then) Director Skills in the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, underlined the importance of higher VET and acknowledged that the Commission would follow up the findings of the QA HiVETnet project in its political work. **Jens Bjornavold**, senior expert from Cedefop, gave an insight into the results of important research work on higher VET. After a brief presentation of the project and the European Guidelines by **Sabine Tritscher-Archan** (ibw), coordinator of QA HiVETnet, and the formal launch of the QA Network by **Liliane Volozinskis**, Director Social Affairs and Training Policy at UEAPME, a lively discussion on higher VET and the European Guidelines was led by **Karin Luomi-Messerer** (3s), in which the entire audience was drawn in. It became evident that the Guidelines were well received and appreciated. Several suggestions for improvement were made which the project partnership implemented after the conference.

## News and Resources

All results produced in QA HiVETnet can be downloaded from the project website:



### European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET

[English](#) || [German](#)

The Guidelines will soon also be made available in French and Greek. Please check out the project website!



### Vocational Skills Week

Following the success of the first event of this kind, the second **European Vocational Skills Week** will take place from 20 to 24 November 2017, with many activities taking place in Brussels and in the Member States, EFTA and EU candidate countries at national, regional and local levels.

► [More information and programme](#)

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