

## National Plan for Quality Assurance within the Vocational Education and Training system.

The National Plan for quality assurance within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system has been developed in response to the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) Recommendation dated June 2009<sup>1</sup> in which Member States are urged to adopt a national approach to improve the quality level of VET systems as well as monitor progress already made.

The Italian situation is characterised, at national and regional level, by the presence of multiple institutional players who contribute in different ways to the implementation of the quality assurance system. Therefore, the Plan takes the form of an institutional framework within which it's possible to bring together and make coherent the multiple existing measures for quality assurance, such as regional accreditation<sup>2</sup> and the National Evaluation System for education<sup>3</sup>.

Starting from the mapping of the existing situation, progressive developments of implementation are foreseen in order to assure a higher quality of training opportunities. To this end, many of the indicators suggested by the European Recommendation are expected to be adopted, simultaneously using the qualitative evaluation which can take into account the complexity of the training activities; the use of indicators and other statistical parameters merely serve to support a greater overview of the assessment, which remains entrusted to the various accountable players.

Approved in 2012 by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, University and Research and Regional Authorities, the National Plan is currently in the implementation phase.

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<sup>1</sup> EQAVET Recommendation 18 June 2009 (2009/C 155/02).

<sup>2</sup> Ministerial Decree 166/2001 in G.U. n. 162 of July 14 2001 - Supplement n. 185 entitled "Accreditation of training and headquarters centres"; 20/03/2008 Understanding between the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, University and Research, Regional Authorities and Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano to define minimum standards for the accreditation system of training organisations and quality of services - GU n. 18 of 23 January 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Decree n. 80 of 28 March 2013 "Regulations on the national evaluation system within vocational education and training" - GU n. 155 of 4 July 2013.



The implementation of the Plan is supported by the work of the National Reference Point (NRP) for quality assurance through the following activities:

- collection of data and information about models and quality assurance activities conducted at national and regional level;
- technical support to central and regional governments as well as to other stakeholders for the implementation of the Recommendation;
- dissemination of models, principles and instruments prepared at European and national level on the basis of best practices.

Monitoring of Plan's progress and its possible revision are entrusted to the institutions involved (Ministries, Regional Authorities and Autonomous Provinces) who meet periodically at the NRP Board in order to assess the progress achieved and any corrective proposals and to prepare the annual report about the Plan's progress and achieved results; periodic reports to the EU will be carried out by all the authorities involved.

Within this Plan, social partners play a dual role: their consultation and involvement are a key element of the training activity's planning - at different levels (both national and regional) - as well as of the NRP's activity through their participation in the Board; they also represent the implementing subject of the so-called "*Fondi interprofessionali*" for continuous training with direct operational responsibilities regarding the implementation of the European Recommendation.



## Key elements of the Plan

The National Plan for quality assurance follows the model proposed by the European Recommendation and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF): for each phase contained in the quality cycle - Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review - existing quality assurance devices are examined in relation to the supply system and to individual VET practitioners. Furthermore, all the actions to be undertaken are outlined in order to increase the consistency with the European model.

Actions to be undertaken are divided by areas of expertise among the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities; in addition, specific actions and their implementation timetable are planned in accordance to the individual phase of the cycle both at system or VET school/organisation level with a special focus on the evaluation phase whereby further proposals of implementation are concentrated.

### Planning and implementation

The Italian legislation already foresees provisions for annual and multiyear planning of VET activities that are basically in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

In particular, the main device related to quality assurance at training system level is the accreditation of training organisations; this device is designed to monitor the quality of training activities also during their delivery and to assess the acquisition and maintenance of certain minimum requirements as well as the achievement of expected results.

Accreditation, entrusted to Regional Authorities and Autonomous Provinces, is regulated by a provision entitled State-Regions Understanding dated March 2008.

In accordance with the existing procedures, areas to be improved are identified in relation to planning and implementation of VET at system level which will include:

- use of mechanisms and procedures for defining training needs;
- link between the aim of training and European objectives targets and monitoring of these goals through specific indicators;



- standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of skills;
- identification of responsibilities and functions assigned to persons/organisations in the field of quality assurance and actions to verify and ensure the quality of both VET system and VET provision;
- procedures for analysis of results and re-planning of activities;
- a communication strategy to ensure optimum dissemination of results;
- specific support for teacher' training.

The following tables summarise commitments assigned to the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities for the improvement of quality assurance in VET.



Planning	Actions at system level	Actions at VET structure level
<b>Ministry of Education, University and Research</b>	Implementation of existing planning mechanisms (defined by law) in order to ensure compliance with the model and the descriptors of the European Recommendation.	Support to the development of existing planning mechanisms in order to ensure compliance with the model and the descriptors of the European Recommendation; promoting consistency of the training provision plan with the afore said descriptors.
<b>Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities</b>	Reinforcement of planning mechanisms (defined by law) to ensure consistency with descriptors of the European Recommendation.	Reinforcement of planning mechanisms to ensure consistency with descriptors of the European Recommendation. Accredited bodies will take the Recommendation descriptors as a reference for planning their activities (at the beginning on a voluntary basis, later compulsory).

Implementation	Actions at system level	Actions at VET structure level
<b>Ministry of Education, University and Research</b>	Development of existing implementation mechanisms (defined by law) to ensure compliance with the model and descriptors of the European Recommendation.	Support to the development of existing implementation mechanisms in order to ensure compliance with the model and the descriptors of the European Recommendation. Promotion of the coherence of the annual activity plan with the descriptors set out in the European Recommendation.
<b>Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities</b>	Reinforcement of implementation mechanisms, agreed with the institutional actors involved, to ensure consistency with descriptors contained in the European Recommendation.	Reinforcement of implementation mechanisms to ensure consistency with descriptors of the European Recommendation. Accredited bodies will take the Recommendation descriptors as a reference for implementing their activities (at the beginning on a voluntary basis, later compulsory).

## Monitoring and Evaluation

The new National Evaluation System (Presidential Decree No. 80 of 28 March 2013) for VET is composed of three actors: INVALSI, the coordinator, INDIRE and a team of inspectors. At least every three years, the Ministry of Education identifies the strategic priorities for evaluating the education system while the National Evaluation System provides the evaluation results with the aim of analysing and planning actions for improvement and innovation. The evaluation process of educational institutions - in the future to be extended to training institutions engaged in VET provision - is based on periodic and systematic audits concerning students' knowledge and skills and it is developed in order to enhance the role of schools in the process of self-evaluation which



consists in the analysis and evaluation of their service.

Among other initiatives to be implemented, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research will be charged with the following activities: external evaluation of schools, monitoring of Higher Technical Education, accreditation system for three-years VET pathways, accreditation of those institutions that apply for carrying out teacher' training.

With reference to other VET initiatives, accreditation remains the main device concerning quality assurance also for the evaluation phase; with regards to the European Recommendation indications, accreditation will be further improved through regional training organisation (at the beginning on a voluntary basis, later compulsory) taking as a reference the European Recommendation model by introducing the following elements: arrangements, criteria and responsibilities for quality assurance within their business management, self-evaluation also testing forms of external assessment, in particular Peer Review; introduction of a rating/ ranking system and a "credits" system; carrying out a Charter of quality for educational provision with the introduction of a quality Label for educational and training structures.

In addition, it is deemed necessary to introduce tools for systematic collection of training processes' learning outcomes and to promote the establishment of a national ICT platform on which to converge a common core of indicators; these are compared with those indicated in the EQAVET Recommendation in order to define a framework of available data and those to be implemented through specific surveys:

- implementation of quality assurance systems within VET organisations (to be implemented);
- expenditure on teacher training (available);
- participation in VET programmes (available);
- educational success / abandonment rate (available);
- job placement at the end of the path (partially available);
- utilisation of skills acquired in the workplace (to be implemented);
- unemployment rate (available);
- consistency of vulnerable group members enrolled within VET (partially available);
- mechanisms for identifying training needs expressed by the labour market (partially available);
- initiatives to promote access to VET (to be implemented).

The tables below show the tasks assigned to the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities in order to improve VET quality assurance with reference to the evaluation phase.



Evaluation	Actions at system level	Actions at VET structure level
<b>Ministry of Education, University and Research</b>	<p>Monitoring the system's trend through a system of indicators in line with the 10 European indicators.</p> <p>Monitoring of high schools and VET institutes.</p> <p>Execution of periodic and systematic checks of VET students' knowledge and skills.</p> <p>External evaluation of schools.</p> <p>Ramp-up Regulation concerning the National Evaluation System.</p> <p>Introduction of an evaluation and self-evaluation system of technical and vocational schools based on common indicators.</p> <p>Monitoring Higher Technical Education.</p> <p>Strengthening the VET accreditation system as a tool for quality assurance of VET organisations. Strengthening accreditation of those institutions that apply for carrying out teacher' training.</p> <p>Piloting project to improve quality of schools.</p>	<p>Introduction of a system of self-assessment based on common indicators.</p> <p>Evaluation of students' learning outcomes.</p> <p>Evaluation of students' professional outcomes at the end of training activity.</p>
<b>Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities</b>	<p>Exploitation and improvement, even for the purposes of evaluation, of the accreditation device (launch up of the inter-institutional confrontation to review accreditation according to the European Recommendation).</p> <p>Evaluation of vocational training' outcomes concerning inclusion or professional development of trained people (evaluation of students' professional outcomes within VET is already practiced in many Italian regions).</p> <p>Implementation of a regional and national indicators system on the basis of the 10 European indicators.</p> <p>Specific initiatives implemented by individual Regions.</p>	<p>Self-assessment and / or Peer review. Accredited bodies will introduce (firstly on a voluntary basis and later compulsory) rules for self-assessment and / or peer review.</p> <p>Collection and analysis of statistical data (consistent with national and regional indicators). Accredited bodies should (firstly on a voluntary basis and later compulsory) collect data to build indicators regarding the individual organisation and the whole system.</p> <p>Evaluation of students' learning outcomes. Accredited bodies will (firstly on a voluntary basis and later compulsory) introduce objective modalities to test learning.</p> <p>Assessment of students' professional outcomes at the end of training activity. This kind of activity is already foreseen by existing legislation on accreditation.</p>



## Review

The follow-up of the multiple activities concerning monitoring and evaluation is assigned to specific structures established by the Ministries, Regional Authorities and Autonomous Provinces concerned with the active involvement of the social partners.

In order to ensure an overall interpretation of results and to transform them into policy proposals to be submitted to policy makers, procedures for a permanent confrontation will be identified; on the basis of an annual report concerning the results achieved, these procedures aim at identifying strengths and weaknesses emerged and possible improvements.

Review	Actions at system level	Actions at VET structure level
<b>Ministry of Education, University and Research</b>	With the support of the National Reference Point Board, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Regional Authorities, Social partners analyse results of VET evaluation and define proposals for improvement.	Definition of procedures for results analysis and planning activity. Review of results achieved by schools consistent with the descriptors contained in the European Recommendation.
<b>Ministry of Labour and Regional Authorities</b>	With the support of the National Reference Point Board, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Regional Authorities, Social partners analyse the results of VET evaluation and define recommendations for improvement.	Definition of procedures for results analysis and scheduling activity. Accredited bodies will (firstly on a voluntary basis and later compulsory) take as a reference for the review of their activities descriptors proposed by the European Recommendation.

