

**A Dissemination Seminar:**  
*Towards an EQAVET inspired tool  
to support thinking about governance*



## SEMINAR 4: A DISSEMINATION SEMINAR

### Your QA Network!

The fourth seminar of the IQAVET network took place on March 8th in the Marker Hotel, Dublin when an opportunity was taken to celebrate the establishment and activities of the network since May 2016, but more importantly to acknowledge the networking and culture of sharing espoused and facilitated through the network by its diverse members. Further, possible future themes for exploration through the network were discussed and agreed.

**Dr Bryan Maguire**, Director of Quality Assurance, QQI opened the dissemination seminar with a focus on collaborating for impact. Of significance in this context is the EQAVET Recommendation which calls for the continual enhancement of national quality assurance systems through National Reference Points by facilitating co-operation and mutual learning, testing and the development of guidance material. Bryan pointed out that active participation in the EQAVET Framework at European, national and local levels is important to build capacity, contribute to policy development and to increase the transparency of VET more generally. We can all share experiences and tools to build resilient networks.

**Andrina Wafer**, EQAVET National Reference Point, spoke of the intentions of the current seminar as a vehicle for initial dissemination of activities to date of the network following an outline of the workplan and EU funded project which began with a seminar in June 2016. The steering group consisting of Alan Hogan, Anne Higgins, Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha, Martha Bolger, Siobhan Magee and Marie Gould were given particular mention given their ongoing support, leadership and commitment to the network which is still in its infancy. Andrina gave an outline of each of the 3 seminars which have taken place under the IQAVET banner in the past 10 months and made reference to the publication being launched at the event which is essentially a record of the themes and contributions made by members of the network through the 3 seminars. More generally, Andrina emphasized the importance of having a shared point of reference. This work is happening in a domestic re-structuring of further education and training (FET) and this network aims to assist colleagues contextualize these changes within framework of QA. This is a practitioner rather than systems perspective. The case studies presented in the publication are testament to all the owners of these case studies and their willingness to share for the benefit of others. Through the seminars to date, Andrina spoke of the solid nuggets of advice that have been shared and captured with the passion being memorable!

In the first seminar, the focus was on data. It was not a matter of 'if' quality is present, but where is the evidence? We need to show what we are doing and in a cohesive manner, demonstrating how QA is integrated into the work of individuals. In the second seminar on Self-Evaluation, the importance of whole organizational commitment to time and leadership was discussed. It was evident from participants that there is a capacity and appetite for improvement and maintenance. In addition, the audience was confident to share, both on a national and international level. It was agreed by participants at the third seminar on Governance that the subject matter is fundamentally about the management of and commitment to relationships. Discussions centred on the role of governance in delivering a democratic and transparent policy approach which both holds alignment to organizational objectives and is an enabler of progress and enables shared narratives. Governance enables, guides and drives work. It both acts to support individuals in their work through providing a direction of travel with an important aspect being risk mitigation. It was also felt that governance promotes respectful and inclusive relationships. To sum up the three seminars, it was clear to all participants that EQAVET needs to be explored – it can nourish QA!



Anne Dunne (City of Dublin ETB), Fintan Kemple (Gorey Community College), and Finola Butler (Further Education Support Service)

**Maria Emília Galvão**, EQAVET Expert, reaffirmed the primary objective of EQAVET, which is to contribute to ongoing reflection on quality management in VET. EQAVET is essentially a platform to share ideas and concerns. Countries and practitioners often express the same difficulties and she pointed out that there are common concerns. Maria Emília expressed her opinion that quality improvement is more important than quality assurance. It is important that practitioners have the necessary stamina and resilience to overcome constraints such as organizational culture. Maria Emília outlined 5 important Cs in building capacity for evaluation to effect change:

- Curiosity: The desire to listen and to grow and learn from mistakes is vital
- Courage: There is always a certain element of uncertainty – even similar organisations are doing different things as required based on context. How can we be sure that we are doing things right?
- Communication: Needs careful consideration. Multiple strategies are required to share ideas effectively and to get buy-in to effect change. Decisions need to be made on how we are going to tell a story. It is wise to record mistakes to steer change. In one's own context, it might be obvious but not for others – Please tell me, show me, demonstrate!
- Commitment: When trying to change or innovate, it is generally not a single eureka moment. We must be patient, resilient, even stubborn!
- Connection: Build your networks and use them!

Maria Emília also provided an overview for some of the key concepts in VET quality management, which include the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle & feedback loops. Participants' attention was drawn to use of the EQAVET indicators – these help practitioners but the explaining comes from YOU! Those initially involved in identifying the EQAVET indicators at European level began with approximately 200 indicators, which were subsequently distilled down to 10 important, relevant indicators. Of course, countries and/or providers may add sub-indicators to suit context. It was reported that the EQAVET website is a large site but can be used to find tools to help practitioners at a certain point in time. The useful Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom (DIKW) Pyramid was also presented. This pyramid illustrates the importance of moving from data through to wisdom in order to make decisions on what to do, act or carry out. Data by itself is not enough. The right questions must be asked to obtain useful data. Colleagues internally and externally are best placed to both give and inform data, thus alluding to the power of the IQAVET and EQAVET networks. Maria Emília concluded her presentation after setting out the 10 EQAVET indicators, which enable providers to adopt a holistic approach to evaluating their quality assurance arrangements, whilst taking context and needs into consideration; and showed how a self-monitoring cycle should incorporate these indicators.



Alan Hogan (Limerick and Clare ETB), also QQI representative on the EQAVET+ working group, with Anne Higgins (Galway and Roscommon ETB) who chaired the event.

**Dr Arancha Oviedo**, EQAVET Secretariat provided an overview of the EQAVET Framework in adding value and supporting the quality and relevance of VET. Based on feedback, it is felt that materials developed at European level are user-friendly but need to be adapted for the local context which is where networking becomes more important! Arancha outlined certain challenges faced by Member States which include an evolving labour market, migration, skills obsolescence and mismatch in addition to new forms of learning and course delivery. Arancha also highlighted the long tradition of EU cooperation in VET upon which we can build and referred to the New Skills Agenda launched in June 2016 which places a focus on employability. Ongoing EQAVET work in key areas was presented by Arancha in addition to an overview of the work programme for 2017 and beyond with apprenticeship/work-based learning provision on the agenda.

**Dr Pádraig Walsh**, Chief Executive of QQI, presented the national context, where a culture of quality within education and training has emerged within Ireland over recent decades. He emphasized that not 'one size fits all' and referred to QA as an emerging discipline and practice and that networks such as IQAVET are a key support to share and implement good practice. Pádraig also outlined the necessity for QQI to re-engage with each sector, including VET over the coming months and years and concluded

that IQAVET has a key role to play in supporting a culture of quality nationally.

### Work-shopping Together!

As a practitioner-led network, the focus is on the practical implementation of available tools. A particularly valuable workshop at this seminar was one led by Maria Emília on the use of EQAVET's quality indicators. Two group discussions were initiated by Maria Emília through use of the following pertinent questions.

Group Discussion 1 – questions:

- What goals has your organisation set for the next 3-5 years?
- What indicators and data are relevant for your organization and its goals and why?
- How will your organization collect, analyse and use data to improve provision over time?
- Who will be involved in indicator selection, data collection and analysis?

Group Discussion 2 – questions:

- Which indicators are more relevant nationally and why?
- Which is the most important indicator nationally right now?

Group discussions at tables proved very fruitful given the diversity of participants present on the day. Feedback to the plenary is summarized as follows:

- It was agreed that the indicators are all related – there is no real 'stand-alone' indicators, although it was suggested that **Indicator 1: Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers** may possibly be envisaged as encompassing all.
- A particularly important indicator for many of the organisations represented was **Indicator 2: Investment in training of teachers and trainers**. It was felt that continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers and trainers is of particular relevance in the drive to improve quality but also to ensure buy-in to build ownership of QA. It was noted that resources are required and there are CPD coordinators in each ETB for example. Research is being undertaken by SOLAS on a skills profile and the FET Professional Strategy is an important driver.
- In terms of data collection, the competency of data collectors and analysts is a concern which was discussed. Data systems are being developed but appropriate skills are required to ask the


right questions to help inform decision-making. It was also acknowledged that organisations need to be collecting relevant data for their own use rather than collection for others externally.

- Depending on context, there are different indicators and data of relevance for organisations. The most important factor is that there is adequate consideration and consultation on priorities so that there is buy-in from all staff.



The IQAVET steering group, Siobhan Magee (FESS), Alan Hogan (LCETB), Martha Bolger (Kildare and Carlow ETB), and Anne Higgins





Maria Emilia responded to the discussions during the plenary session with several thought-provoking comments and practical tips:

- Prevailing constraints are a concern and can only be adequately uncovered and dealt with through discussion. Ensure awareness of all constraints by continuing to ask lots of questions!
- Discussions at the plenary suggested difficulties selecting indicators. It is an organic process! We use indicators to tell a story. Although we must respond to data required from national authorities, indicators must also be viewed with a focus on serving your communities and learners and to indicate trends. Again, ask questions!
- It is essential that all stakeholders are involved in selecting indicators and not only senior management and QA offices – extend consultation to teaching staff and external stakeholders for example.
- Locally, issues may be all different but generally can be related or ‘pegged’ to a national priority or trend. Use these to improve the quality of your provision!

### **Future Direction?**

The seminar concluded with a useful and engaging discussion on the next steps for the network. Although in its infancy, the significant engagement to date has given all a glimpse of the potential power of this network to effect positive change. In particular, the desire to continue sharing best practice and showcasing ongoing work was emphasized by participants. In terms of a focus for the upcoming period, the overwhelming majority of participants expressed the view that the QA of apprenticeship and work-based learning was a timely topic for prioritisation.