



EQAVET

European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Supporting the implementation of the
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
for Vocational Education and Training

**EQAVET working
group on:**

***EQAVET and the
quality assurance
approach in adult
learning in the context
of continuing VET***

**Supporting adult
learning, continuing
VET and soft skills
development by using
quality assurance
descriptors and
indicators**

June 2015

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INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The current labour market trends, coupled with the pressures of an aging population and workplace changes, have contributed to a rethink of adult learning (AL). In this context, continuing VET (CVET) needs to be more responsive to the training needs and expectations of both adult learners and employers. In fact, there seems to be a consensus that in order to deliver higher and more relevant skills to the labour market, including the increasing demand for soft skills, education and training systems need to ensure the highest quality in their provision.

AL (in a CVET context) is of particular importance because it ensures the delivery of the skills that employers need. Consequently, governments in Europe are concerned with skills, both technical and soft, in terms of their development, shortages and mismatches.

Soft skills development has become particularly challenging for VET policymakers and providers as well as for employers because, despite their importance in workplace productivity and in individuals' ability to improve their working situations, they have taken a back seat to "hard/technical skills" programmes. It is not surprising, therefore, that policymakers at national and European level seek to address many of the challenges faced by stakeholders in developing and assessing soft skills.

Closely related to these elements is the overarching principle of lifelong learning (LLL) requiring that E&T initiatives and programmes be coordinated and developed in a comprehensive and cumulative high quality learning continuum. In the light of these trends, UNESCO (2013) argues that European VET systems are facing the "challenge of accommodating a broader range of vocationally relevant adult learning, merging general with vocational education and formal with non-formal and informal learning modalities"¹. Both qualifications and quality assurance frameworks at European and national level are key tools for supporting high quality education and training processes (including the provision

¹ UNESCO (2013). *Second global report on Adult Learning and Education – rethinking literacy*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002234/223449e.pdf>

of VET programmes and student/worker learning outcomes) for individual and societal development as well as for promoting the employability of individuals and facilitating their mobility in the single European labour market. The provision of high-quality formal and non formal education and training for adults within continuing VET should aim at developing individuals' key competencies (in the form of knowledge, hard/technical and soft skills) leading to qualifications at all levels of the current qualification frameworks.

Adult learning in the EU

According to the 2012 Labour Force Survey, there is still a long way to go for some countries in Europe regarding adult participation in LLL; and according to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 20% of the EU working population has low literacy and low numeracy skills and 25% of adults lack the skills to make effective use of ICT. The ET 2020 benchmark for adult participation in lifelong learning is 15% by 2020 – a target set "with a view to increasing the participation of adults in lifelong learning, particularly that of the low-skilled"².

The issue of the participation of adults in LLL runs parallel to another major challenge: how to ensure quality in AL/CVET. This need was acknowledged by the European "Thematic Working Group on quality in Adult Learning" set up by the European Commission in 2011. In its final report *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* (2013)³, this group noted that the EQAVET Framework constitutes a good basis for addressing the issue of quality assurance in the adult learning sector, namely by consolidating a common understanding on the principles/criteria and quality indicators relevant to AL/CVET. This recommendation has created a basis for examining the common ground between the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*.

Work on this common ground commenced when the EQAVET network agreed to establish a working group to explore these issues within its discussion on the EQAVET work programme 2014-2015.

² EU Council of Ministers (2009). *Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (May 2009)* at [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01))

³ https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/thematic_wg_quality_report.pdf

EQAVET WORKING GROUP ON ADULT LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUING VET

The Working Group on “EQAVET and the quality assurance approach in adult learning in the context of continuing VET” was mandated to examine how the EQAVET Framework could support quality assurance approaches in AL within continuing VET provision. This work is linked to the issue of how the development of soft skills can be quality assured. This topic was explored by examining existing practices in Member States (i.e. from those countries participating in the working group)⁴.

Purpose and objectives

In 2014, the European Commission report to the European Parliament and Council on the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation noted that “*an appropriate development of the EQAVET model is a measure suggested by the European thematic working group on quality in adult learning (therefore also in continuing VET), with a view to an overarching lifelong learning quality assurance approach*”⁵. This is based on the findings of an external evaluation of the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation which recommended that: “*the lifelong learning dimension, though part of the underpinning philosophy of the EQAVET Recommendation, is not reflected in the EQAVET descriptors and indicators*”⁶.

Based on these findings, the EQAVET working group explored ways to strengthen the lifelong learning dimension of EQAVET, building on the work achieved by the Thematic working group on quality in adult learning (thereafter TWG on AL).

The objective was to:

- a) foster a common understanding of the principles/criteria and quality indicators relevant to CVET by building on the work carried out by the EQAVET Network and the TWG on AL,
- b) support the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (NRPs) and other relevant stakeholders in addressing quality assurance issues relevant to AL and CVET.

For information on the objectives of the working group, check the mandate on the EQAVET website at: http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/working-groups/working-groups_2014/Adult-learning-and-CVET.aspx

The working group examined the extent to which the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* (developed by the TWG on AL) converge or diverge in relation to their quality criteria, descriptors and indicators. In addition, the group agreed to explore current and emerging practice in relation to how quality assurance is ensured in the development and provision of soft skills relevant to the employability of learners and workers. This approach sought to learn from experience rather than using a theoretical approach based on existing definitions and conceptions of soft skills.

The material developed by the group will support continued work:

- At EU level: the EQAVET Network comprising the EU Member States, social partners and the European Commission in their endeavour to promote European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET by using the *EQAVET Framework*.
- At national level: the Quality Assurance National Reference Points which bring together the relevant stakeholders at national and regional levels in order to ensure follow up initiatives; and VET institutions providing continuing VET

Additionally, these deliverables will be disseminated for the benefit of the adult learning community

⁴ For more information about participating countries, visit http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/working-groups/working-groups_2014/Adult-learning-and-CVET.aspx

⁵ Evaluation of implementation of EQAVET, London June 2013. More information at http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf

⁶ The Report of the Commission to the EU Parliament and Council, Brussels 28/1/2014. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf

QUALITY ASSURANCE DESCRIPTORS AND INDICATORS FOR ADULT LEARNING AND CONTINUING VET

In order to strengthen the lifelong learning dimension of EQAVET by exploring the work developed by the TWG on AL, the working group compared the quality assurance descriptors and indicators of the *EQAVET Framework* and those presented in the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*.

The working group agreed that these two frameworks have some unique aspects which need to be taken into account, as they reflect either a particular legislative framework (the *EQAVET Recommendation*) or a speciality field (adult learning in the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*).

The following commonalities and differences between the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* were identified:

Commonalities:

- Both offer explicit statements of desired quality assurance in order to clarify expectations and to enable better adult learning and continuous VET provision;
- Both seek to raise the bar of providers' performance by identifying important quality criteria, descriptors and indicators and by organising expectations in a clear, coherent framework;
- Both acknowledge that real improvement will result only through the commitment of the relevant stakeholders (policymakers and implementers, providers and staff, learners, employers);
- Both approaches create frameworks within which accountability and quality improvement might be better conceived and executed at all levels.

Differences:

- **Status:** while the *EQAVET Framework* has a legal status, crystallised in a legal act, the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* is the result of the TWG

on AL that was set up within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) to address the issues of quality in adult learning.

- **Intent:** the *EQAVET Framework* is a reference tool that seeks "to help EU countries and participating countries develop, improve, guide and assess the quality of their own vocational education and training systems"⁷. The *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* is a "contribution to the debate on policy development in adult learning"⁸ and specifically addresses the accreditation of AL providers.
- **Circumstances:** the focus of the *EQAVET Framework* is on ensuring quality in VET, a concern that extends through initial and continuing VET. The *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*, which focuses on adult learning, acknowledges efforts to promote quality in adult learning provision (formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational).
- **Contexts:** the *EQAVET Framework* is, in some respects, the culmination of more than a decade's worth of quality assurance development in VET. The *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*, which seeks to express a broad consensus within adult learning as to appropriate accreditation requirements of AL providers, reflects emerging priorities.
- **Assumptions:** the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* share certain assumptions, namely the principle that making the performance of providers (respectively VET providers and AL providers) clear, and measurable in order to lead to improved provision. However, the two frameworks differ in the way the process of evaluation is understood.

⁷ [Recommendation on the establishment of European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET](#), July 2009 [Official Journal 2009/C 155/01].

⁸ [Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning, Final Report](#), 24th October 2013.

- **Scope:** the *EQAVET Framework* can be applied to initial vocational training (IVET) and/or continuing vocational training (CVET), according to characteristics of each Member State's VET system and the type of VET providers. The *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* is designed to cover the policy area relating to the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational — undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

Taking these elements into consideration, the working group analysed and compared the indicative descriptors and indicators of the *EQAVET Framework* and those proposed by the TWG on AL (in the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers*) in order to show correlations (similarities and differences), areas of overlap and/or gaps in coverage between the two frameworks.

This exercise provides support and guidance which is designed to build a comprehensive quality assurance approach to adult learning in the context of continuing VET.

Indicative descriptors and indicators for AL – towards a comprehensive quality assurance approach

Based on this work the following guidance suggests ways in which both frameworks can be complemented in order to enhance their usability (see Table 1 and 2 below).

Table 1 – Comparing indicative descriptors of the *EQAVET Framework* and of the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers (proposed by the TWG on AL)*⁹

EQAVET indicative descriptor	AL descriptor (proposed by the TWG on AL) ¹⁰	Guidance proposed by the EQAVET working group
QA cycle phase: PLANNING		
European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers	Objectives, target groups, type of provision/services, understanding of the market, principal stakeholders, lifelong learning perspective	<p>- The AL criterion “understanding of the market” should be formulated as in the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> “identification of training needs in the labour market”[as a result of]“the ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders”</p> <p>- The “lifelong learning perspective” should be an overarching principle in AL/CVET interventions as in the <i>EQAVET Recommendation</i> rather than as an individual descriptor in the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i>.</p>

⁹ Only those EQAVET indicative descriptors that are relevant in this exercise are included in this table.

¹⁰ **List of quality criteria and descriptors proposed by the TWG on AL:**

Criteria - The provider has a clear mission. **Descriptors:** objectives; target groups; type of provision/services; understanding of the market; principal stakeholders; lifelong learning perspective

Criteria -The provider is learner/customer- oriented. **Descriptors:** learners are at the centre of provision; provision and methods are adapted to the adult target group and their specific needs; validation of non-formal and informal learning is available; a lifelong learning perspective is encouraged

Criteria -There is transparency of: information; offers and methods; learners' rights/protection for learners; financial information and governance. **Descriptors:** clear aims; transparent curriculum; process of learning; learning activities, learning outcomes

Criteria -Staff are competent. **Descriptors:** competent teachers/facilitators ; competent guidance practitioners ; competent management ; adult learning methods, didactics ; continuing competence development for staff

Criteria -The provider has a human resources policy. **Descriptors:** selection procedures policies, payment and working conditions

Criteria -Supports are available to learner and facilitators. **Descriptors:** administrative procedures ; communication; infrastructure ; practical support; guidance (information on different possibilities and career management skills)

Criteria -Infrastructure and resources are relevant to the different courses and students. **Descriptors:** fair and open assessment; learning outcomes; learning process

Criteria -A quality management system exists. **Descriptors:** quality procedures/guidelines

Criteria -Provision is relevant and beneficial for stakeholders, especially the adult learners. **Descriptors:** equity; employability and labour market orientation; active citizenship; basic skills; etc.

QA cycle phase: IMPLEMENTATION		
Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans	Learning resources, staff, financial resources, material resources/facilities (ICT, classrooms, library, canteen, on-the-job environments, etc)	Specify the EQAVET descriptor for AL/CVET interventions by adopting the AL descriptors – learning resources, staff, financial resources, material resources/facilities (ICT, classrooms, library, canteen, on-the-job environments, etc)
Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance	Competent teachers/facilitators, competent guidance practitioners, competent management, continuing competence development for staff	Consider guidance practitioners as one of the staff categories in AL/CVET provision
QA cycle phase: EVALUATION		
The EQAVET descriptors for this quality criterion are broader and more specifically described than the corresponding AL descriptors. In order to bridge this gap, it is suggested that in the evaluation of AL/CVET interventions the following guideline is used	<i>There is no relevant descriptor in AL related to this topic</i>	Use the EQAVET indicative descriptors (Evaluation of outcomes and processes) and related descriptors in the AL/CVET interventions

Key messages on quality assurance descriptors for AL

Based on this analysis, the working group identified the following key messages which will support policymaking at European and Member State levels:

1. Enable the convergence of AL and CVET policies and practices by explicitly stating the EQAVET usage of lifelong learning as an “overarching principle” in policy documents and, in particular, in guidance materials at European level.
2. Maximize the compatibility between the EQAVET Framework and the proposed Framework for the accreditation of AL providers by clarifying the terminology in AL/CVET (e.g. “understanding the market” equals “identifying training needs in the labour market”) in policy documents and guidance materials, namely European glossaries.

3. Expand the EQAVET Framework, by:

- improving the current set of EQAVET descriptors by exploring those proposed in the Framework for the accreditation of AL providers (e.g. learning resources, material resources/facilities etc.) at European level, namely in guidance materials.
- exploring the diversity of the VET workforce by considering such categories as “guidance practitioners” as well as workplace trainers/tutors/coaches, programme developers and assessors, etc. at European level (in policy documents and guidance materials).

For further information on the alignment of the proposed AL and the EQAVET indicative descriptors, see Annex I (page 1).

Table 2 – Comparing the indicators of the EQAVET Framework and of the Framework for the Accreditation of AL providers (proposed by the TWG on AL)

EQAVET indicator	AL Indicator (proposed by the TWG on AL ¹¹)	Guidance proposed by the EQAVET working group
Indicator 1 -Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers	Indicator 1 - Quality assurance systems Indicator 2 - Accessibility of adult learning programmes	Use EQAVET indicator 1 and complement it with AL indicator 2 in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes, e.g. existing/non existing requirement for the accreditation of AL/CVET providers, type of AL/CVET offer, etc.
Indicator 2 - Investment in training of teachers and trainers	Indicator 3 - Quality of staff	In view of the updated research results on occupational regulation and in order to align EQAVET and AL/CVET definition of AL/CVET practitioners, it is suggested that national stakeholders take account of both national and EU occupational regulations in defining AL/CVET practitioners at national level
Indicator 4 - Completion rate in VET programmes	Indicator 4 - Availability of information and guidance	Use EQAVET indicator 4 and complement it with AL indicators 4e), 5c) and 9 in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes
Indicator 5 - Placement rate in VET programmes:	Indicator 6 - Outcomes	Use EQAVET indicator 5 and complement it with AL specifications in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes
Indicator 6 - Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace	Indicators - 5 Leadership and management of adult learning programmes; and 6 - Outcomes	Use EQAVET indicator 6b) to measure the satisfaction of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences in AL/CVET programmes
Indicator 7 - Unemployment rate	Indicator 7 - Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion	Given the existing correlation between the EQAVET indicator 7 and the AL proposed indicator 7a), there is no need for a guideline
Indicator 8 - Prevalence of vulnerable groups	Indicator 2 - Accessibility of adult learning programmes	Given the existing correlation between the EQAVET indicator 8 and the AL proposed indicator 2c) there is no need for a guideline
Indicator 9 - Mechanisms	Indicator 8 - Mechanisms to	Use EQAVET indicator 9 to identify training needs in

¹¹ **Set of quality indicators proposed by the TWG on AL:**

Indicator 1. Quality Assurance Systems: Number of nationally recognised accredited providers; Number of providers using quality assurance systems.

Indicator 2. Accessibility of adult learning programmes: Rate of accredited providers to population; Participation rates per region; Ratio of vulnerable groups participating in adult learning.

Indicator 3. Quality of Staff: Number of licensed practitioners from recognised programmes; Number of licensed practitioners participating in continuing professional development programmes;

Indicator 4. Availability of information and guidance: Flexible access to information and guidance including the number of access points in the region; Ratio of access points per head of population; Number of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually; Proportion of adults with access to an on-going guidance service; Retention rates on adult learning programmes.

Indicator 5. Leadership and management of adult learning programmes: Completion rate; Achievement rate; Progression rate; High level of learner satisfaction rates; Cost effectiveness of the programme (or cost per learner) / Return on investment; The extent to which budgets and financial targets are met.

Indicator 6. Outcomes: Percentage of participants in sustained employment 6 months after completing programme; Percentage of stakeholders indicating that skills achieved by learners meet skills demand; Percentage of participants reporting wider benefits from adult learning, including social, citizenship and health effects; Percentage of participants with improved employment situation; Percentage of participants gaining a qualification on completion; Participants progressing to further training on completion.

Indicator 7. Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion: Unemployment rate; Volunteering rate; Growth rate of SME sector; Economically inactive rate; Percentage of local, regional and national bodies in which the social partners are involved; Percentage of institutions / bodies providing adult learning at local, regional and national levels in which the social partners are involved.

Indicator 8. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: The percentage of major sectors represented by employer representative bodies with a clearly defined role. Efforts to ensure relevance of adult learning provision to labour market needs.

Indicator 9. Validation of non-formal and informal learning: Number of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning; Number of guidance access points / practitioners per head of population.

Indicator 10. Qualifications System: Number of diplomas / certificates issued against NQF standards.

to identify training needs in the labour market	identify training needs Indicator 7 - Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion	AL/CVET interventions
Indicator 10 - Schemes used to promote better access to VET	Indicator 4 - Availability of informed guidance	Use EQAVET indicator 10 and complement it with the proposed AL indicator 4 "Availability of informed guidance" in AL/CVET interventions
<i>There is no relevant EQAVET indicator related to this topic</i>	Indicator 10 - Qualifications systems	Adopt the proposed AL indicator 10 in AL/CVET interventions in line with national context and priorities

Key messages on quality assurance indicators for AL

Based on this analysis, the working group proposes the following key messages on quality indicators for AL in the context of CVET:

1. Expand EQAVET indicator 1 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicator 2a). In doing this, there is a need to take into account a) the identified caveats and b) how to define "population" (total population, cohort of individuals aged 15-74, other).
2. Explore other "indications" of the quality of staff (e.g. teachers/trainers, trainers at the workplace, guidance practitioners) and how to measure them in order to enhance the *EQAVET Framework* (Indicator 2) including the proposed AL indicator 3. In doing this, there is a need to take account of such identified caveats as the issues on occupational regulation at EU level.
3. Expand EQAVET indicator 3 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicator 2b) "Participation rates per region" in the light of potential caveats.
4. Expand EQAVET indicator 4 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicators
 - Retention rates on adult learning programmes;
 - Progression rate of AL/CVET learners;
 - Number of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning.
5. Expand EQAVET indicator 5 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicators
 - 6c) "percentage of participants reporting wider benefits from adult learning, including social, citizenship and health effects"
 - 6d) "percentage of participants with improved employment situation".
6. Complement EQAVET indicator 10 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicator 4 "Availability of informed guidance".
 - flexible access to information and guidance including the number of access points in the region;
 - ratio of access points per head of population;
 - number of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually
 - proportion of adults with access to an ongoing guidance service; no of guidance access points/practitioners per head of population.
7. Consider the adoption of the AL proposed indicator 5f) that might be useful to assess the internal efficiency of AL/CVET programmes. If adopted, it would need to be operationalised.

For further information on how the group elicited these guidelines and messages, check Annex II (page 10).

SOFT SKILLS AND ADULT EDUCATION

The close relationship between employability and skills, in particular when improving the employment opportunities of adults, provided the basis for the working group to reflect also on training in soft skills and quality assurance.

The relationship between employability and skills is widely acknowledged and consequently it is not surprising that they have become a priority in the European Union since the economic crisis began in 2008. In fact, over recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on skills, particularly on skills training, i.e. on the techniques used in training design, methods of delivery and assessment.

Introduction

The OECD Survey of Adult Skills¹², as part of its programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), collects and analyses data that assist governments in assessing, monitoring and analysing the level and distribution of skills among their adult populations: A report of the first results was released in 2013 and it reflects on the implications of such data for European education and training policy. It presents seven key findings, of which two are related to the task at hand: i.e.:

- education and skills increase employability; and
- sustaining skills brings significant positive economic and social outcomes.

In fact, until very recently, it was primarily hard skills that enterprises looked for when hiring and promoting their employees. Now multiple studies have shown the importance of soft skills on job performance, and employers are requiring that candidates possess both.

A sound framing principle of soft skills training programmes seems to be the notion that soft skills are more experienced-based and need to be reinforced throughout a person's lifetime, i.e. they need to be imparted, modelled and reinforced over time by different stakeholders (families, schools, work and social environment).

¹² OECD (2013), *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing; available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>

The "Heckman equation"¹³ (Invest+ Develop+ Sustain = Gain), for example, is a well-known illustration of this perspective in arguing that skills development is a dynamic process, i.e. many of these skills are built incrementally and need to be refreshed over time to reflect career and education changes.

Currently, soft skill provision/formation is regarded as a vital quality dimension in AL/CVET from the point of view of both employees and employers: on the one hand, nearly every employee needs some level of training/coaching to perform his/her job and to develop competencies that are crucial for his/her career; on the other hand, enterprises need to identify key values and/or competencies they wish to promote within their organisation in order to be productive and remain competitive in today's globalised economy. In other words, in order to prepare learners for success, both personal and professional, it is crucial that these skills are explicit quality criteria in AL/CVET programmes because they are proving increasingly valuable in quality management today.

In line with approaches to skills development, it is important to consider which methods to use for the assessment and/or recognition of soft skills by AL/CVET providers, employers and learners themselves (self-assessment). At this point, it is worth reflecting that the standard approach to performance measurement has been based on SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Timely) indicators. The measurement of soft skills, however, should lead to a rethinking of assessment approaches, i.e. rather than focus only on the assessment of knowledge and hard skills, both the hard and soft sides of learners' performance should be measured if AL/CVET learning success is truly to be gauged.

According to Anderson ((2008)¹⁴, the most commonly used method to assess soft skills has

¹³ Nobel Prize winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman's work is crucial to understand the great gains to be made by investing in the early and equal development of human potential. For further information, see

<http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/presenting-heckman-equation>

¹⁴ Anderson, C. (2008). An Overview of Soft Outcome – Informal Learning Measurement Tools.

been to use case study examples showing “the journey” (distance travelled) a person has experienced in working with an organisation. Other methods of assessment of soft skills may include, for example, employee appraisal, 360° assessment, face-to-face surveys, portfolio-based assessments, computer-based skills assessment as well as accreditation/recognition of skills acquired in prior learning. Similar to the lack of consensus around how to define “soft skills”, there is no agreement about a universal set of indicators for measuring of soft skills acquisition. Instead, there is currently a lot of research and discussion about how progress in developing soft skills in VET can be captured effectively and there seems to be some agreement that measuring progress is easier when it is linked to specific workplace behaviours that are visible to employers and/or tutors.

In the EU, three legal acts, i.e. *Key competences for lifelong learning*¹⁵, *European Qualifications Framework*¹⁶ and *Europass*¹⁷, as well as the initiative, *ESCO*¹⁸, approach soft skills in different ways. That may be explained by the nature of the instruments themselves, the time gap resulting from the year of their adoption/launching, and the evolving character of the concepts supported by a multitude of research projects. Generally speaking, it can be said that these instruments show both similarities and differences in the use of concepts and terms related to soft skills but the

bottom line is that they echo the need for a lifelong approach to developing and enhancing soft skills.

EQAVET working group – some reflections on soft skills and adult learning

It was against this background that the issue of soft skills development was explored and its implications for quality AL/CVET interventions was analysed by the working group. To that end, existing practices in the countries participating in the working group were used as the basis for reflection and for drawing some key conclusions that are presented below (for further information see Annex III, page 23):

Key message 1 – Identification of soft skills

The typology and importance of soft skills in the countries that participated in the working group depend very much on the context and the perceived needs of individuals and organisations. However, there are three interrelated categories of soft skills that seem to prevail above all others:

1. communication skills, including such different aspects as oral communication, conversation
2. interpersonal skills, namely the ability to work in teams, relate to people, manage/mediate conflicts, discussions, negotiations and bargaining and
3. problem solving

The practices described by the representatives of Member States in the working group showed the predominance of certain policy areas and emerging challenges:

Policy areas associated with soft skills

- Social inclusion: associated with the unemployed, job seekers, employees and beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk of social exclusion (such as pre-retirement age people, adults with no primary and secondary education, individuals with low basic skills);
- Employability: associated with a) acquired qualifications (in which case, soft skills complement the knowledge gained in education/training with the requirements of professional roles);

The Research and Development Bulletin. Volume 6 Number 1 (March 2008)

<http://sos-evaluation.co.uk/sites/default/files/articles/An%20Overview%20of%20Soft%20Outcome%20Measurement%20Tools%20by%20Clayton%20Anderson.pdf>

¹⁵ Recommendation [2006/962/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on *Key competences for lifelong learning* [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006].

¹⁶ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* [Official Journal 2008/C 111/01] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-ecf/files/journal_en.pdf

¹⁷ Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single *Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)* OJ 390, 31.12.2004, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32004D2241&from=EN>

¹⁸ European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/home>

- b) the acquisition of specialised qualifications;
- Organisational effectiveness: associated with management of classes (with students showing learning difficulties and/or behavioural problems, or difficulties coming from different mother tongues and cultures) and school counselling services (crisis intervention and conflict resolution).

Challenges in developing adult learners' soft skills within AL/CVET programmes seem to be linked to:

- the identification of the kind of soft skills to be developed; and
- how these soft skills will be addressed in:
 - developing the curriculum,
 - defining the adequate pedagogical strategies and
 - assessing/measuring outcomes.

Key message 2 – Focus on what works for whom

Positive and proactive engagement with stakeholders is perceived in Member States as a critical factor in ensuring the quality of AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills training, both at macro level (policy frameworks and regulations) and at meso level (AL/CVET courses/programmes). Active participation of learners, employees and employers is acknowledged as being a guarantee that the intervention is “fit for purpose”, i.e. it fulfils stakeholders' requirements, needs or expectations.

Key message 3 – “Fit for purpose” practices

Methodologies used by Member States echo such principles as:

- not everyone learns in the same way¹⁹,

- active learning (e.g. cooperative learning, project-based learning), and
- transformative learning, defined as making meaning of learners' experiences through reflection²⁰.

At the heart of the above-mentioned principles and methodologies of AL, there is the centrality of experience, together with transformative learning whereby AL is perceived as a means of personal and social transformation.

Key message 4 – Unlocking the value of soft skills

Unlocking the value of soft skills in AL/CVET training constitutes a challenge to both VET systems and providers at Member State level, including curriculum developers, teachers/trainers and assessors.

One important point that underpins the approaches of Member States to soft skills training is the fact that AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills are subject to the same quality guiding principles as those used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers, i.e.

- close cooperation with stakeholders (learners, teachers/trainers, employers) in framing and regulating those interventions as well as in conceptualising, planning the mode of delivery, setting learning goals/objectives and content of AL/CVET training programmes on soft skills;
- identification of both employers and learners' needs in the field of soft skills training.

It seems less clear how interventions will be evaluated, including the impact of policy initiatives at system level and the assessment of soft skill attainment in order to judge the quality and standards of soft skills training programmes.

Key message 5 – Enhancing employability through quality assurance

¹⁹ As epitomised in Kolb's experiential learning theory and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Kolb, Y. Alice and Kolb, A. David (2008). *Experiential Learning Theory: A Dynamic, Holistic Approach to Management Learning, Education and Development*. Available at <http://learningfromexperience.com/media/2010/08/ELT-Hbk-MLED-LFE-website-2-10-08.pdf>) and Gardner, H. (2011) *Multiple Intelligences: The First Thirty Years*. Available at

<https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/intro-frames-of-mind-30-years.pdf>

²⁰ Mezirow, J. (1997). *Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. New directions for adult and continuing education*, no. 74, Summer 1997. Jossey-Bass Publishers. Available at www.hrdmax.com/images/column_1325932983/Mezirow%20Transformative%20Learning.pdf

The impact of quality assurance on employability can be considered in three dimensions:

1. Policymakers at all levels have developed a more sophisticated understanding of:
 - the complexity of the workplace,
 - the needs of employers and employees in a variety of work settings (e.g. public and private, large and small, self-employment and employment), and
 - the diversity of attributes that contribute to employability (knowledge, “hard” and “soft” skills)
2. There has been a wider debate on the nature of employability, whereby employment and career paths go beyond the first destination of VET programme completers
3. There is an increasing awareness of the diversity of activities of AL/CVET providers and the sharing of good practice in the sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES

Assuring the quality and measuring the effects of AL within CVET provision is multi-faceted and complex. Quality assurance in AL/CVET can be viewed in many different ways, i.e. at macro (policy), meso (institutional) or micro (learning process) level and can examine educational/training, management or administrative issues. Moreover, there are many stakeholders in AL/CVET and consequently there are many and diverse expectations of the sector. Definitions of the key elements of AL/CVET provision and expectations of outcomes, boundaries and standards on the part of those who have a stake in the sector, are key issues. These need to be addressed, not only to satisfy stakeholders but also to provide a basis for quality assurance

The comparative reading of the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* carried out by the working group showed that there are interrelationships between the two frameworks. However, the correlation between the two frameworks is sometimes partial, and significant gaps exist between the two sets of descriptors and indicators. Also there are differences in relation to conceptualisation and terminology.

Quality in AL/CVET is assured through significant inputs, processes and contexts; however the outcomes are the critical area. The emergence of a new agenda (based on the premise that skills, namely soft skills, are necessary to make workers more operationally relevant in an enterprise context and more actively involved in the life of society) brought to the forefront of the quality debate the importance of outcome factors such as progression into or securing employment. One of the problems with the debate on soft skills for employability at European level, however, is that it continues to evolve with little or unclear underlying agreement about the more fundamental questions regarding its appropriate scope and measurement.

It is not surprising, therefore, that challenges to effective quality assurance of AL/CVET include:

- Aligning the European instruments in relation to quality assurance and improvement of learning outcomes, including the assessment of “soft skills”, to enable stakeholders at macro, meso and micro levels to utilise these instruments in a synchronised manner
- Expanding the *EQAVET Framework*, e.g. complementing the existing EQAVET indicators and adopting and operationalising those indicators proposed by the TWG on AL deemed to provide the most value for assuring quality of AL/CVET
- Developing further the connections between the *EQAVET Framework* and the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers* by implementing them in a coordinated and holistic way
- Building up a common understanding on soft skills development, including the identification of descriptors and/or indicators as a way to guarantee quality in AL/CVET interventions for employability.

Annex I – Comparing indicative descriptors of the *EQAVET Framework* and of the *Framework for the accreditation of AL providers (proposed by the TWG on AL)*

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING: QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
1. Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions & indicators.	European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers	1. The provider has a clear mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> objectives target groups type of provision/services understanding of the market principal stakeholders lifelong learning perspective 	<p>In general terms, there is correlation between the quality criterion (Planning) & related descriptors of the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> and the criteria (1 and 9) & descriptors of the outlined <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i>.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 1</p> <p>a) The AL criterion “understanding of the market” should be formulated as in the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> “identification of training needs in the labour market”[as a result of]“the ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders”</p> <p>b) The “lifelong learning perspective” should be an overarching principle in AL/CVET as in the “<i>EQAVET Recommendation</i> (“Whereas statements no. 1, 3, 9, 14, 15 & 17 and in para. 1 of the recommendation to Member States) rather than as an individual descriptor in the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i>.</p> <p>There is partial correlation between criterion 3 and related descriptor of the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> and the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> (criterion & related descriptor)</p> <p>There is partial correlation between criterion 3 and related</p>
	Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored	3. There is transparency of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> information [...] 		

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING: QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
	quality assurance system in place		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equity • [...] • active citizenship • basic skills • etc. 	
<p>Key message 1</p> <p>a) Assist the convergence of AL and CVET policies and practices by explicitly stating the EQAVET usage of Lifelong Learning as an “overarching principle” in policy documents and, in particular, in guidance materials at European level</p> <p>b) Maximize the compatibility between the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> and the proposed <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> by promoting a common terminology in AL/CVET (e.g. “understanding the market ”equals“identifying training needs in the labour market) in policy documents and guidance materials, namely European glossaries</p>				

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>2. Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles</p>	<p>Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans</p> <p>Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned</p> <p>The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers</p> <p>Staff undertake regular training</p>	<p>7. Infrastructure and resources are relevant to the different courses and students</p> <p>3. There is transparency of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ [...] financial information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning resources • staff • financial resources • material resources/facilities (ICT, classrooms, library, canteen, on-te-job environments, etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competent teachers/ facilitators • competent guidance practitioners • competent management 	<p>In general terms, there is correlation between the quality criteria no. 7 and 4 of the proposed Framework for the accreditation of AL providers and the EQAVET quality criterion</p> <p>GUIDELINE 3 Specify the EQAVET descriptor for AL/CVET by adopting the AL descriptors- learning resources, staff, financial resources, material resources/facilities (ICT, classrooms, library, canteen, on-te-job environments, etc).</p> <p>There is partial correlation of the quality criteria and descriptors on staff competence of the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> and the</p>

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
	and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance	4. Staff are competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuing competence development for staff [...] ²¹ 	<p>EQAVET Framework (criterion and descriptor)</p> <p>GUIDELINE 4 Consider guidance practitioners as one of the staff categories in AL/CVET provision</p>
<p>Key message 2 Expand the EQAVET Framework, i.e.</p> <p>a) improve the current set of EQAVET descriptors by exploring those proposed in the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> (e.g. learning resources, material resources/facilities etc.) at European level, namely in guidance materials</p> <p>b) explore the diversity of the VET workforce by considering such categories as “guidance practitioners” as well as workplace trainers/tutors/coaches, programme developers and assessors, etc at European level (in policy documents and guidance materials)</p>				

²¹ The descriptor “adult learning methods, didactics” is used twice: here and in quality criterion 2 “The provider is learner/customer-oriented”. We have chosen not to repeat it.

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>3. Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement</p>	<p>Self- assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at initiative of VET providers</p> <p>Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction</p> <p>Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders</p> <p>Early warning systems are implemented</p>	<p>8. Learning is documented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fair and open assessment • learning outcomes • learning process 	<p>The EQAVET quality criterion and respective descriptors are broader and are more specifically described than quality criterion 8 of the proposed Framework for the accreditation of AL providers.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 5 Integrate the EQAVET quality criterion (Evaluation of outcomes and processes) and related descriptors in the AL/CVET set of descriptors</p>
<p>Key message 3 Strengthen the evaluation dimension in the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> by further exploring quality assurance in the field of assessment/certification of qualifications at European level, i.e.</p> <p>a) build up the EQAVET quality criterion “<i>Evaluation of outcomes and processes</i>” and related descriptors in the field of AL/CVET, particularly in relation to the “validation of non formal and informal learning”</p> <p>b) look further into the assessment of soft skills, namely by identifying descriptors and/or indicators</p>				

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
4. Review	<p>Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on learning and teaching environment</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of the review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation</p> <p>Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place</p>	10. Provision is relevant and beneficial for stakeholders, especially the adult learners	<p>[...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employability and labour market orientation <p>[...]</p>	<p>There is partial correlation between the criteria and the respective descriptors of the EQAVET Framework and the proposed Framework for the accreditation of AL providers, namely the EQAVET criteria and descriptors are broader in scope and more specifically defined.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 6 Adopt the EQAVET criterion (Review) and related descriptors in AL/CVET interventions.</p>
		2. The provider is learner/customer- oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learners are at the centre of provision provision and methods are adapted to the adult target group and 	<p>There is a partial and indirect correlation between the EQAVET Framework and the proposed Framework for the accreditation of AL providers (criterion 2 and related descriptors).</p>

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> their specific needs validation of non - formal and informal learning is available a lifelong perspective is encouraged 	GUIDELINE 7 a) Integrate the AL descriptor “provision and methods are adapted to the adult target group and their specific needs “ in the EQAVET quality criterion (Planning) regarding CVET provision; b) Integrate the descriptor “validation of non -formal and informal learning” in the EQAVET criterion (Evaluation) regarding AL/CVET provision
		3. There is transparency of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [...] offers and methods learners’ rights/protection for learners [...] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [...] transparent curriculum process of learning learning activities, learning outcomes 	There is partial correlation between the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> and the proposed <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> (see above the correlation between EQAVET Planning & Implementation criteria / related descriptors and Criterion 3 and some of the descriptors of the <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i>) GUIDELINE 8 Adopt the AL criterion (Transparency) as a principle that percolates through the system of AL/CVET, e.g. in the Planning phase of any AL/CVET intervention.
		5. The provider has a human resources policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> selection procedures policies, payment and working conditions 	Criterion 5 and the related descriptors of the proposed <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers</i> have no correspondence to the <i>EQAVET Framework</i> . GUIDELINE 9 Consider criterion 5 and its related descriptors in the

EQAVET QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		PROPOSED ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS		ALIGNING EQAVET and ADULT LEARNING QUALITY CRITERIA and DESCRIPTORS
QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	QUALITY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
				EQAVET Implementation phase when internally aligning/assigning resources to AL/CVET interventions.
<p>Key message 4 Enhance the alignment of the proposed <i>Framework for the accreditation of AL providers with the EQAVET Framework</i> by considering such quality criteria as</p> <p>a) “Transparency, fair treatment and equity” and define them as explicit VET principles in policy documents and guidance material at European level, particularly in regard to AL/CVET systems and provision</p> <p>b) “Human resources policy” and integrate it as an explicit criterion in the implementation phase of the EQAVET quality cycle, particularly in guidance materials at European level</p>				

Annex II – Comparing the indicators of the EQAVET Framework and of the Framework for the Accreditation of AL providers (proposed by the TWG on AL)

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:</p> <p>a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative;</p> <p>b) share of accredited VET providers.</p> <p>Definition</p> <p>a) Percentage of VET providers showing evidence of applying the EQAVET principles within a defined quality assurance system, where the number of <u>registered VET providers</u> =100%;</p> <p>b) Percentage of VET providers who are accredited, where the number of <u>registered VET providers</u> = 100%.</p>	<p>1. Quality assurance systems</p> <p>a) no. of nationally recognised accredited providers;</p> <p>b) no.of providers using quality assurance systems;</p> <p>2. Accessibility of adult learning programmes</p> <p>a) rate of accredited providers to population;</p>	<p>There is full correlation between EQAVET indicator no. 1 a) and 1b) and the proposed AL indicator no. 1 a) and 1b) but there is not a correspondent EQAVET indicator to AL indicator no. 2.</p> <p>Main issues:</p> <p>AL indicator no. 2 may be useful to indicate how accessible AL programmes are but two caveats must be kept in mind: a) one is geographic, i.e.the use of the indicator in regions that are scarcely populated vs densely populated areas, and b) the other is related to the increasing use of distance and remote learning which is facilitated by the use of technology.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 1</p> <p>Use EQAVET indicator no. 1 and complement it with AL indicator no.2 in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes, e.g. existing/non existing requirement for the accreditation of AL/CVET providers, type of AL/CVET offer, etc.</p>
<p>Key message 1</p> <p>Expand EQAVET indicator 1 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicator 2a). In doing th is, there is a need to take into account a) the identified caveats and b) how to define “population” (total population, cohort of individuals aged 15-74, other)</p>		

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers:</p> <p>a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training;</p> <p>b) amount of funds invested.</p> <p>Definition</p> <p>Investment in training of <u>teachers</u> and <u>trainers</u>:</p> <p>a) Percentage of teachers and trainers participating in <u>accredited</u> training programmes, from the total number of <u>registered</u> teachers and trainers;</p> <p>b) Total amount of funds annually invested per teacher and trainer in teachers' and trainers' further education and training.</p>	<p>3. Quality of staff</p> <p>a) no.of licensed practitioners from recognised programmes;</p> <p>b) no.of licensed practitioners participating in continuing professional development programmes;</p>	<p>There is correlation between the two indicators but the target group for the TWG/AL are " licensed practitioners" while in EQAVET it is the number of registered teachers and trainers.</p> <p>According to Koumenta, M. <i>et al</i> (2014)²² there are three forms of occupational regulation (licensing, certification and registration) and one form of regulation that has no legal backing or state involvement (accreditation). In these authors' view licensing is the most restrictive form of occupational regulation It "refers to situations where it is unlawful to carry out a specified range of activities without meeting certain criteria such as [...] qualifications, work experience etc</p> <p>Main issues:</p> <p>The issue of "quality of staff", however, goes beyond the the amount of funds invested in training and the number of participants in training programmes. It seems, therefore, there is a need to keep exploring other dimensions in relation to the role of teachers and trainers, and other categories of staff e.g. trainers at the workplace and guidance practitioners, in quality VET.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 2</p> <p>In view of the updated research results and in order to align EQAVET & AL/CVET definition of AL/CVET practitioners, it is suggested that national stakeholders take account of both national and EU occupational regulation in defining AL/CVET practitioners at national level.</p>
<p>Key message 2</p> <p>Explore other "indications" of the quality of staff (e.g. teachers/trainers, trainers at the workplace, guidance practitioners) and how to measure them in order to enhance the EQAVET Framework (Indicator 2) including the proposed AL indicator 3. In doing this, there is a need to take account of such identified caveats as the issues on occupational regulation at EU level.</p>		

²² Koumenta, M., Humphris, A., Kleiner, M., and Pagliero, M. (2014) *Occupational Regulation in the EU and UK: Prevalence and Labour Market Impacts*, UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/343554/bis-14-999-occupational-regulation-in-the-EU-and-UK.pdf

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>3. Number of participants in VET programmes (1), according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (2)</p> <p>- (1) For Initial VET (<i>IVET</i>): a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant for LLL (Lifelong learning): percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.</p> <p>- (2) Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrant, handicapped persons, length of unemployment, etc.</p> <p>Definition</p> <p>a) Percentage of annual cohort completing lower secondary school/compulsory education participating in <i>IVET</i> programmes at upper secondary level (which lead to a formal qualification);</p> <p>b) Percentage of active population (15-74 years old) entering <i>CVET</i> programmes (which lead to recognition</p>	<p>2. Accessibility of adult learning programmes</p> <p>b) participation rates per region;</p>	<p>There is correlation between the two indicators but the TWG/AL indicator adds up a regional dimension in the participation rates.</p> <p>Main issues</p> <p>Like in indicator 1, there is a caveat associated with this regional dimension i.e. comparing highly and scarcely populated areas is probably meaningless. It may be, however, useful to compare the participation rate for different regions, for example, a year on year comparison.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 3</p> <p>Use EQAVET indicator 3 and complement it with the proposed AL indicator 2b in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes</p>
<p>Key message 3</p> <p>Expand EQAVET indicator 3 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicator 2b) "Participation rates per region" in the light of potential caveats</p>		

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
<p>4. Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria</p> <p>Definiton Completion rate in VET programmes: a) Percentage of those completing (i.e. attaining a formal qualification) <u>IVET</u> programme(s) (which lead to a formal qualification), compared to those entering IVET programme(s); b) Percentage of those completing (i.e. attaining a formal qualification) <u>CVET</u> programme(s) (which lead to recognition), compared to those entering CVET programme(s).</p>	<p>4. Availability of information and guidance</p> <p>e) retention rates on adult learning programmes;</p> <p>5. Leadership & management of adult learning programmes</p> <p>a) completion rate; b) achievement rate; c) progression rate;</p> <p>9. Validation of non- formal and informal learning</p> <p>No. of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning.</p>	<p>There is partial correlation between the EQAVET indicator no 4 and the TWG/AL proposed indicators 4e), 5c) and 9.ven that the TWG/AL indicator no. 4 includes retention rates and indicator no. 5 includes progression rates.</p> <p>Main issues</p> <p>1. Retention is a difficult concept to define and acquires different meanings depending on the context of the term's usage. In the research literature, retention may refer to a no. of definitions, e.g. it may refer to the successful completion of a programme or to learners meeting clearly defined learning goals whether they are programme credits or achievement of new skills. Retention in AL/CVET programmes should be considered in the context of learner intent, especially given the varied background and motivations of learners who choose to enroll in a AL/CVET programme. For retention metrics to be useful, they must be defined and interpreted with the learners goals in mind.</p> <p>2. Progression is another difficult concept, i.e. there is no single policy objective for progression. It may refer to further progression within the qualifications system, transition from one type of learning to another, from one context to another, or from learning to employment. In general, progression for adult learners is expressed in policy as related to skills but, within a LLL perspective, progression may be simply defined as an individual learner's progression from engagement in learning to further stages in learning</p> <p>3.The TWG/AL indicator no. 9 brings to the forefront the underlying strategic issue of the lifelong learning principle, that is validation of non-formal and informal learning. According to a recent article²³ on the 2014 European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning [...] <i>possibilities for validation of non-formal and informal learning</i>,</p>

²³ Villalba-García, E., Souto-Otero, M. and Murphy, I.(2014) The 2014 European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: Prospects and trends on validation in Europe. BWP 5/2014 (BWP-Heft). Available at <http://www.bibb.de/veroeffentlichungen/de/bwp/show/id/7416>

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND KEY MESSAGES
		<p><i>[...] are still rather fragmented and connection between its different components and different sectors is still in progress.[...] On the whole, validation is more common in VET and in relation to those qualifications that are closer to the labour market than in relation to general education qualifications.</i></p> <p>Under these circumstances, the proposed indicator seems not to add any quality information but it may be useful to compare statistical progress over time.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 4 Use EQAVET indicator no. 4 and complement it with AL indicators 4e), 5c) and 9 in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes</p>
<p>Key message 4 Expand EQAVET indicator 4 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Retention rates on adult learning programmes; b) Progression rate of AL/CVET learners; c) No. of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning 		

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>5. Placement rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (3);</p> <p>b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.</p> <p>(3) For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.</p> <p>Definition Placement rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>a) Proportion of VET programme completers who are placed either in the labour market, further education or training (including university) or other destination within 12-36 months after the end of programme;</p> <p>b) Percentage of VET programme completers who are employed one year after the end of training.</p>	<p>6. Outcomes</p> <p>a) percentage of participants in sustained employment six months after completing programme;</p> <p>c) percentage of participants reporting wider benefits from adult learning, including social, citizenship and health effects;</p> <p>d) percentage of participants with improved employment situation;</p> <p>e) percentage of participants gaining a qualification on completion;</p> <p>f) participants progressing for further training on completion.</p>	<p>EQAVET indicator no. 5 on the learners' destination correlates with TWG/AL indicator 6 but the latter is more disaggregated in terms of i) sustained employment in 6a), improved employment situation in 6d) and wider benefits [...] in 6c) .</p> <p>GUIDELINE 5 Use EQAVET indicator 5 and complement it with AL specifications in line with national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes.</p>
<p>Key message 5 Expand EQAVET indicator 5 by adopting and operationalising the proposed AL indicators</p> <p>6c) “percentage of participants reporting wider benefits from adult learning, including social, citizenship and health effects”</p> <p>6d) “percentage of participants with improved employment situation”</p>		

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QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES; GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:</p> <p>a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria;</p> <p>b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.</p> <p>Definition Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: a) Percentage of VET programme completers working in relevant occupations; b1) Percentage of employees of a given <u>sector</u> who, within a period of 12-36 months from completing the VET <u>programme</u>, find that their training is relevant for their current occupation; b2) Percentage of employers of a given <u>sector</u> who are satisfied to find VET <u>programme</u> completers with relevant qualifications and competences required for the work place; b3) Percentage of employers of a given <u>sector</u> who are satisfied with <u>programme</u> completers.</p>	<p>5. Leadership & management of adult learning programmes</p> <p>d) high level of learner satisfaction rates;</p> <p>6. Outcomes</p> <p>e) percentage of stakeholders indicating that skills achieved by learners meet skills demand;</p>	<p>There is correlation between EQAVET indicator 6 and AL indicator 5 and 6 but the TWG/AL indicator requires a “high” level of learner satisfaction rates.</p> <p>Main issues This requirement may pose problems to providers in using the TWG/AL indicator because</p> <p>a) it is not always clear what learner satisfaction ratings are measuring. Perhaps it is not possible to measure “true satisfaction” because true satisfaction is so intertwined with both intrapersonal and methodological considerations that it may never be possible to disentangle them;</p> <p>b) difficult to keep a high level of response rate, which needs to be above 80% according to the relevant literature.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 6 Use EQAVET indicator 6b) to measure the satisfaction of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences in AL/CVET programmes</p>
<p>Remark EQAVET formulation of indicator 6 and its operational definition is perceived as adequate to measure the individuals and employers’ satisfaction with acquired skills and competences in AL/CVET programmes. There is, therefore, no need for further action.</p>		

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QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES, GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>7. Unemployment rate (4) according to individual criteria (4) Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work</p> <p>Definition Unemployment rate: the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people employed plus unemployed.</p>	<p>7. Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion</p> <p>a) unemployment rate;</p>	<p>There is correlation between the EQAVET and TWG/AL indicators.</p>
<p>8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups:</p> <p>b) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender;</p> <p>c) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender.</p> <p>Definition Prevalence of <u>vulnerable groups</u>:</p> <p>a) Percentage of participants and of programme completers from disadvantaged groups, defined at European and national level, from the total number of participants and VET programme completers;</p> <p>b) Percentage of programme completers, from disadvantaged groups defined at European and national level, compared to the number of those entering</p>	<p>2. Accessibility of adult learning programmes</p> <p>c) ratio of vulnerable groups participating in adult learning;</p>	<p>There is correlation between the EQAVET and TWG/AL indicators.</p>
<p>Remark Given the existing correlation between the EQAVET indicators and the AL proposed indicators, there is no need for further action</p>		

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QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES; GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:</p> <p>a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels;</p> <p>b) evidence of their effectiveness.</p> <p>Definition</p> <p>Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market</p> <p>a) Type of mechanisms used to update the VET offer to the future labour market needs;</p> <p>b) Information on mechanisms used to provide <u>stakeholders</u> with the most recent information on the future needs of the labour market.</p>	<p>8. Mechanisms to identify training needs</p> <p>The percentage of major sectors represented by employer representative body with a clearly defined role.</p> <p>7. Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion</p> <p>e) percentage of local, regional and national bodies in which the social partners are involved;</p> <p>f) percentage of institutions/bodies providing adult learning at local, regional and national levels in which the social partners are involved.</p>	<p>There is correlation between EQAVET indicator 9 and the proposed AL indicator 8 as well as AL indicator 7 (a proxy).</p> <p>AL indicator 8 focus on major sectors and the “clearly defined role” role of these stakeholders.</p> <p>The term “major” may raise concerns in individual Member States, namely a) what “major” sector means (focus on size or national/regional priorities?) and b) the underlying tension between “major” and “minor” sectors (economically irrelevant or small in size?). Considering that SMEs are largely disseminated across Europe and account for a large proportion of employees, it may not be clear either what their role is in identifying training needs if only “major” sectors have a say.</p> <p>As for “a clearly defined role”, the question seems to be not that the role is clear or not but rather the nature of their role, i.e. consultative or deliberative, which is a contextual variable.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 7</p> <p>Use EQAVET indicator 9 to identify training needs</p>
<p>Remark</p> <p>It is suggested that EQAVET indicator 9 and its operational definition is kept, given that the proposed AL indicator 8 does not seem to add any extra value. There is, therefore, no need for further action.</p>		

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QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES; GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET:</p> <p>a) information on existing schemes at different levels; b) evidence of their effectiveness.</p> <p>Definition Schemes used to promote better <u>access</u> to VET: a) Type of schemes used to improve <u>access</u> to VET; b) Information demonstrating the capacity of the VET system to increase <u>access</u> to VET.</p>	<p>4. Availability of informed guidance</p> <p>a) flexible access to information and guidance including the no. of access points in the region; b) ratio of access points per head of population; c) no. of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually d) propotion of adults with access to an on going guidance service; e) no of guidance access points/practitioners per head of population.</p>	<p>There is correlation between the two indicators but the TWG/AL indicator is presented in a quite disaggregated way in terms of information/guidance access points.</p> <p>This indicator is particularly relevant for adult learners and ,in particular, it supports policy interventions related to TWG/AL proposed indicators 4e), 5a), 5 b) and 5c).</p> <p>GUIDELINE 8 Use EQAVET indicator 10 and complement it with the proposed indicator 4 "Availability of informed guidance"</p>
<p>Key message 6 Complement EQAVET indicator 10 by adopting and operationalising AL proposed indicator 4 "Availability of informed guidance"</p> <p>a) flexible access to information and guidance including the no. of access points in the region; b) ratio of access points per head of population; c) no. of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually d) propotion of adults with access to an on going guidance service; e) no of guidance access points/practitioners per head of population</p>		

EQAVET INDICATORS	PROPOSED INDICATORS TO MONITOR ADULT LEARNING QUALITY	ALIGNING EQAVET AND ADULT LEARNING INDICATORS
QUALITY INDICATORS AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	PROPOSED INDICATORS	NOTES; GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>5. Leadership and management of adult learning programmes</p> <p>e) cost effectiveness of the programmes (or cost per learner)/ return on investment;</p> <p>f) the extent to which budgets and financial targets are met.</p>	<p>EQAVET set of indicators does not include a similar indicator. TWG/AL Indicator no. 5e) may raise concerns among AL/CVET providers, staff and learners, particularly in times of crises, about the financing of programmes.</p> <p>Examining the return for investment (ROI) for AL/CVET can be difficult for many reasons, particularly</p> <p>a) if there is no (or weak) connectivity between data and measurement, accountability and evaluation, and research;</p> <p>b) if data are obtained from disparate and unconnected sources.</p> <p>At national level ROI for AL/CVET implies a national comprehensive database that meets the accountability requirements prescribed in the national legislation on AL/CVET and, if they exist, they serve specific purposes and requirements</p> <p>A full fledged ROI for AL/CVET can be, therefore, a costly exercise</p> <p>Indicator 5 f) should not constitute a problem.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 9 Use the proposed AL indicator 5 f) to assess the internal efficiency of AL/CVET programmes</p>
<p>Key message 7 Consider the adoption of the AL proposed indicator 5f) that might be useful to assess the internal efficiency of AL/CVET programmes. If adopted, there is a need to operationalise it</p>		

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	<p>7. Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion</p> <p>a) [unemployment rate]</p> <p>b) volunteering rate;</p> <p>c) growth rate of SME sector;</p> <p>d) economically inactive rate;</p> <p>e) [percentage of local, regional and national bodies in which the social partners are involved;</p> <p>f) percentage of institutions/bodies providing adult learning at local, regional and national levels in which the social partners are involved.]</p>	<p>EQAVET set of indicators does not include a similar indicator. This indicator is premised on the notion that adult learning not only has a positive impact on individuals in terms of their employability but it also has an impact on society as a whole, e.g. increasing employment (7a), contributing to economic growth (7c) and social care (7b). The indicator also has a “proxy” dimension, i.e. it indirectly measures the contribution of adult learning to economic growth and social inclusion by measuring the involvement of social partners (7e and 7f).</p> <p>GUIDELINE 10 Complement the use of the EQAVET set of indicators by adopting those dimensions in the proposed AL indicator 7 that fit in the national context and requirements for AL/CVET programmes</p>
<p>Key message 8 Consider the adoption of (some dimensions) the proposed AL indicator 7 “Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion”, e.g. “volunteering rate”. If any of these dimensions are adopted, there is a need to operationalise them.</p>		

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	<p>10. Qualifications systems</p> <p>Number of diplomas/certificates issued against NQF standards.</p>	<p>EQAVET set of indicators does not include this indicator.</p> <p>It is important that adult learners have confidence in the credibility of their AL/CVET programmes and the qualifications they deliver. Providers granting these qualifications must ensure they meet the corresponding specifications as described in the NQF as per the level it is located. The European NQFs are generally referenced to the EQF but they may have different rules as to how qualifications can be certified.</p> <p>The proposed AL indicator 7 is a “proxy” indicator, i.e. it indirectly measures the quality of adult learning provision leading to a qualification by assuming that the issuance of a certificate/ diploma against the NQF standards ensures the quality of the learning outcomes.</p> <p>GUIDELINE 11 Adopt the proposed AL indicator 10 in AL/CVET interventions in line with national context and priorities</p>
<p>Key message 9 It is suggested that the issue of ensuring the quality of certification of learning outcomes is further investigated in accordance with the EQAVET Recommendation²⁴.</p>		

²⁴ See “Whereas statement” number 14 [...] The Framework [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training should therefore support the implementation of the EQF, in particular the quality of the certification of learning outcomes. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training](#) [Official Journal C 155 of 8.7.2009].

Annex III – Soft skills development in adult learning in continuous vocational education and training: a scan of the landscape

Participating Countries COUNTRY	Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Norway, Scotland
Level of analysis	Macro level (VET systems) and Meso level(VET providers)
Dimensions addressed in the analysis	Key Points and Lessons Learnt
1. Introduction 1.1 What is the context and challenge(s) being addressed? 1.2 Which soft skills are being imparted? 1.3 For how long has the intervention been carried out ?	Key point : Identification of soft skills 1.1 The good practices describe soft skills training within public policies on adult and continuing education and training. The interventions range from training courses (provided on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis or within the frame of existing training programmes/ projects) to policy initiatives (national frameworks, regulations on examinations, certification of qualifications of trainers and prior learning validation procedures) 1.2 The good practices focus on a variety of soft skills that can be used in many different types of jobs: communication, bargaining/negotiation, conflict management, problem solving, selling skills, customer care, managing relationships, alliance and trust building, autonomy, responsibility, being a team player/working with others and problem solving. 1.3. The time span of the described interventions varies, i.e. a) Training courses may be i) <i>ad hoc</i> courses or ii) courses delivered within short-term or long standing programmes; b) Policy initiatives (national frameworks, regulations on examinations, certification of qualifications and prior learning validation procedures) have been in place for some time or are the result of reforms extending from late 1990s/early 2000s to the present Lesson learnt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The typology and importance of soft skills depend very much on the context and the perceived needs of individuals and organisations. However, two interlocked categories of soft skills seem to prevail among others, i.e. a) communication skills, including such different aspects as oral communication, conversation and b) interpersonal skills, namely the ability to work in teams, relate to people, manage/mediate conflicts, discussions, negotiations and bargaining and c) problem solving

<p>2. Stakeholders and partners</p> <p>2.1 Who is the target group of the good practice, e.g.employed adult learners, unemployed adult learners, other?</p> <p>2.2 Who are the users of the good practice,e.g.: employers, employment services, other?</p> <p>2.3 Who are the institutions and partners involved in the good practice, and what is the nature of their participation?</p> <p>2.4 What main challenges do teachers/trainers face in fostering adult learners'soft skills within AL/CVET programmes, e.g. curriculum development, pedagogy, assesment?</p>	<p>Key points:</p> <p>1. Policy areas associated with soft skills and challenges in developing adult learners' soft skills within AL/CVET programmes</p> <p>2.1. Target groups are diverse and include : school staff (teachers/trainers, school psychologists and special educators, kindergarten assistants), further education learners, trainers of adult learners, employees, unemployed, job seekers, beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk of social exclusion</p> <p>2.2 Users of the described good practices: teachers/ trainers, examiners, learners, employees, employers, LLL providers, employment services, experts (in subject matters and psychology), unemployed, job seekers, beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk (pre-retirement age people, adults with no primary and secondary education, individuals with low basic skills)</p> <p>2.3 Participation of stakeholders involve: Ministries, State Agencies/Governmental bodies, Sector Skills Councils, Research Centres, VET teachers/trainers training centers, social partners(e.g. employers and employers' associations).</p> <p>2.4 Challenges are context related and, consequently, they arise from diferent sources, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a) the pressure from the training providers to make skills embedded in units/courses order to maximise income for the providers; b) the conditions for training delivery (i.e. time, place and pace that suits both the training provider and the learner), the assessment of learning, the development of awards and training material due to the fast change within certain sectors, c) type of soft skills to be developed, how these will be adressed in curriculum development and which pedagogical strategies will be used to develop them, d) need for education systems to provide a mechanism for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal education system, thereby increasing personal career development and mobility opportunities, while saving the individual's time and financial resources. <p>Lessons learnt</p> <p>1. Policy areas associated with soft skills development are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social inclusion: associated with unemployed, job seekers, employees and beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk of social exclusion (such as pre-retirement age people, adults with no primary and secondary education, individuals with low basic skills); ▪ Employability: associated with a) acquired qualifications (in which case, soft skills complement the knowledge gained in education/training with the requirements of professional roles), b) the acquisition of specialised qualifications; ▪ Organizational effectiveness : associated with management of classes (with students showing learning difficulties and/or behavioral problems, or difficulties coming from different mother tongue and culture) and school counseling services (crisis intervention and conflict resolution). <p>2. Main challenges in developing adult learners' soft skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The main challenges in developing adult learners' soft skills within AL/CVET programmes seem to be linked to a) the
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	<p>identification of the kind of soft skills to be developed and b) how these soft skills will be addressed in i) developing the curriculum, ii) defining the adequate pedagogical strategies and iii) assessing/measuring outcomes.</p>
<p>3. Methodological approach</p> <p>3.1 What methodology has been used to address the initial issue(s) and lead to a successful outcome? In what way has it been a participatory process? 3.2 Which pedagogical strategies did work best in developing this type of skills?</p>	<p>Key point: Focus on what works for whom</p> <p>3.1 Methodological procedures vary depending on the level of analysis (macro or meso level)</p> <p>a) At macro level, policy initiatives (e.g. frameworks and regulations) are characterized by the involvement of social partners (Sector Skills Councils, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, trade unions, voluntary organisations) who ensure the relevance of the skills to the occupational role and any other relevant qualifications which a learner is required to achieve, confirm the practical relevance of regulations;</p> <p>b) At meso level, provision interventions feature such methodological procedures as i) trainers initially training in-house supervisors/managers as work based assessors, ii) embedded learning, implying a thorough need analysis at the workplace, iii) project work, including “piloting” of learning outcomes in real life context, and iv) modular approach, including writing case studies, v) blend learning (distance and in-class learning), role playing, case studies.</p> <p>3.2 Methodologies such as experiential learning, embedded learning, blend learning together with pedagogical strategies such as project work and case studies are used to the detriment of more traditional delivery modes.</p> <p>Lesson learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Methodologies echo such principles as a) not everyone learns in the same way, as epitomised in Kolb²⁵s experiential learning theory (ELT) and Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences²⁶ (MI), b) active learning (e.g. cooperative learning, project-based learning), and c) transformative learning, defined by Mezirow²⁷ (TL) as making meaning of learners’ experiences through reflection. At the heart of the above-mentioned theories and methodologies of adult learning, there is centrality of experience, together with transformative learning whereby adult learning is perceived as a means of personal and social transformation.
4. Validation	Key point: “Fit for purpose” practices

²⁵ Kolb, Y. Alice and Kolb, A. David (2008). *Experiential Learning Theory: A Dynamic, Holistic Approach to Management Learning, Education and Development*. Available at <http://learningfromexperience.com/media/2010/08/ELT-Hbk-MLED-LFE-website-2-10-08.pdf>

²⁶ Gardner, H. (2011) *Multiple Intelligences : The First Thirty Years*. Available at https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/intro-frames-of-mind_30-years.pdf

²⁷ Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, no. 74, Summer 1997. Jossey-Bass Publishers. Available at www.hrdmax.com/images/column_1325932983/Mezirow%20Transformative%20Learning.pdf

<p>Confirmation by employers and learners that the practice addresses their training needs, i.e. Has the good practice been validated with the stakeholders/final users? If so, please describe it briefly.</p>	<p>The purpose of validation is to ensure the relevance of AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills training but there are slight nuances according to the type of intervention, i.e. a) to ensure that frameworks and regulations are consistent with and contribute to VET national strategies and policies, b) to ensure that the training is securely located within national frameworks and regulations, c) to ensure that the training offers a valuable learning experience to learners.</p> <p>Lesson learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive and proactive engagement with stakeholders is perceived as a critical factor in ensuring the quality of AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills training, both at macro level (policy frameworks and regulations) and at meso level (AL/CVET courses/programmes). Active participation of learners, employees and employers is acknowledged as being a guarantee that the intervention is “fit for purpose”, i.e. it fulfils stakeholders’ requirements, needs or expectations.
<p>5. Lessons learnt</p> <p>5.1 What are the key messages and lessons learnt to take away from your good practice experience? 5.2 How long did it take to learn lessons and identify key success factors?</p>	<p>Key point : Unlocking the value of soft skills</p> <p>5.1 Some helpful insights emerge from the good practices on soft skills training and learning in AL/CVET:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to develop comprehensive training systems for professionals, including the acquisition of knowledge as well as hard and soft skills; ▪ Acknowledgment of key role played by stakeholders (e.g. enterprises, social partners, employers, employees, professionals) in developing a) policy on soft skills (regulations, frameworks) at system level and b) training courses on soft skills at VET provider level; ▪ Responding to industry needs by delivering industry-driven and enterprise led training ▪ Researching best practice by keeping a close eye on what is happening internationally ▪ Supporting the development of meaningful careers ▪ Addressing specific quality issues, e.g. scrutiny procedures to ensure that soft skills are delivered in dedicated units or embedded within a unit and or course, cooperative work by employees and employers in planning the mode of delivery, learning goals, and content. <p>5.2 Length of time to learn lessons and identify key success factors is hardly mentioned or, if mentioned, it is not clear how it may influence or may have influenced the review of the intervention.</p> <p>Lessons learnt Unlocking the value of soft skills in AL/CVET training constitutes a challenge for both VET systems and providers, including curriculum developers, teachers/trainers and assessors. A strong point that underpins Member States approaches to soft skills training is the fact that AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills are subject to the same quality guiding principles as those used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers , i.e.</p>

	<p>a) close cooperation with stakeholders (learners, teachers/trainers, employers) in framing and regulating those interventions as well as in conceptualising, planning the mode of delivery, setting learning goals/objectives and content of AL/CVET training programmes on soft skills;</p> <p>b) identification of both employers and learners' needs in the field of soft skills training.</p> <p>A less clear point seems to be the evaluation of the interventions, including the impact evaluation of policy initiatives at system level and the assessment of soft skill attainment for judgement of quality and standards of soft skills training programmes.</p>
<p>6. Quality assurance</p> <p>6.1 How is the process of developing learners' soft skills quality assured?</p> <p>6.2 What are/were the measures that need(ed) to be put in place for the good practice to be institutionally and financially sustainable?</p>	<p>Key point: Enhancing employability through quality assurance</p> <p>6.1 The process of ensuring the development of learners' soft skills comprises a) at macro level such legal initiatives as national skills frameworks, regulations, certification and validation of prior learning systems; at provision level: i) use of the EQAVET quality cycle (plan- implement-monitor-review), ii) training assessors to equip them with the necessary expertise and skills, ii) validation, verification and external authentication of provided training</p> <p>6.2 Institutional sustainability seems to be unproblematic when the described good practice is at system level or is part of a long standing training programme. Financial sustainability for some of the interventions, in particular participation in training courses, seems to depend on two sources of funding. i.e. ESF co-funding and individuals' fees.</p> <p>Lessons learnt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three main policy goals have contributed to the development and implementation of the EQAVET Framework over the last decade, which include: a) to widen participation in VET programmes, namely AL/CVET programmes and b) to enhance employability and lifelong learning. The impact of quality assurance in employability, can be considered in three dimensions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Policy makers at all levels have developed a more sophisticated understanding of i) the complexity of the workplace, ii) the needs of employers and employees in a variety of work settings (e.g. public and private, large and small, self-employment and iii) employment) and an appreciation of the diversity of attributes that contribute to employability (knowledge, "hard" and "soft" skills) 5. There has been a wider debate on the nature of employability, whereby employment and career paths go beyond the first destination of VET programme completers 6. There is an increasing awareness of the diversity of activities of AL/CVET providers and a sharing of good practice in the sector.
<p>7. Conclusion</p> <p>Conclude, explaining the impact/usefulness of your</p>	<p>Key point :</p> <p>Most of the the examples of good practices highlight the value of the described interventions which include, for example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the institutionalisation of validation procedures (through agreements established between government body and VET institutions),

<p>good practice for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) adult learnersb) other relevant stakeholders, e.g. employers	<p>inclusion of verified training courses in the offer of further education institutions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ recognition of benefit from training by learners and employers. <p>Lesson learnt</p> <p>Due to the importance placed on the development of soft skills within the AL/CVET training, the impact of actions on organisations and individuals is regarded as a key issue, i.e. the relevance and quality of interventions are perceived as determining their effect on individuals and organisations/enterprises. However, no formal impact evaluation seems to be in place. Instead, there is anecdotal evidence that learners and employers value training: employers seem to see an improvement that hopefully leads to improved business performance while learners/employees acquire skills relevant to today's workplace..</p>
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