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BEHEALTH

QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR NURSING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (NVET) PROVIDERS

IIEK DELTA, Greece and partners

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMEE – Association for medical education in Europe

ECFMG – Educational commission for foreign medical graduates

EFN – European Federation of Nurses

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EOMS – Educational organisation's management system

EOPPEP – National organisation for qualifications certification and vocational guidance

EQAVET – European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

ESG – European Standards and Guidelines

HE – Higher Education

IEC – International Electrotechnical Commission

IFMSA – International federation of medical student associations

IQAS – Internal Quality Assurance System

ISO – International Organisation for Standardization

JDN – Junior Doctor's network

LET – Learning, Education and Training

LLL – Life Long learning

NVET - Nursing Vocational Education and Training

QA – Quality Assurance

QAF – Quality Assurance Framework

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

TTF – Teacher's task force

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNI – Non-profit association in Italy, developing-publicizing-promoting quality standards

VET – Vocational Education and Training

WFME – World federation for medical education

WHO – World Health Organisation

WMA – World medical association

DEFINITIONS

ESG standards provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance. They were adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2015 (ENQA-ESG, 2015).

Learning outcomes are knowledge, skills, and competencies that a learner is expected to acquire and demonstrate upon completing a learning process. These outcomes should be clear, measurable, and aligned with the objectives of the educational program (ENQA, 2016).

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well (WHO, 2022).

Nursing education refers to formal learning and training in the science of nursing (Encyclopedia.com, 2018).

Qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards (EU, 2018).

Quality Assurance (QA) is a part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. The confidence provided by quality assurance is twofold—internally to management and externally to customers, government agencies, regulators, certifiers, and third parties (ASQ, 2024b). In nursing education, QA is a systematic review of nursing educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are maintained (Selvi, 2018). QA is a dynamic process providing the nursing education institute/campus with tools to measure current performance levels and facilitate continuous improvement.

Self-assessment is a comprehensive, systematic, and regular review of an organisation's activities and further proposes these results referenced against the accepted model modified according to (UNSD, 2024).

Vocational Education and Training is the training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation in which the student or employee wishes to participate (Eurostat, 2024).

Well-being is the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and managing stress (Psychology Today, 2024).

1 INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance framework for VET providers in nursing is the 2nd Result of the Erasmus+ BEHEALTH project.

This document includes a description of the Scope of Quality Assurance Framework at the Global and European levels; How to enhance your QA Framework according to EU and International standards; and a Wellbeing and Mental Health survey interconnected with the ENQA ESG 2015 standards.

According to the literature review conducted as the 1st Result “Comparison report including International and EU Quality Assurance Frameworks in Nursing”, there are some selected regulatory frameworks and guidelines for NVET at the Global, European and National levels presented in Figure 1.

Of these frameworks, guidelines and standards, our further results are based on EQAVET (2009) and ENQA-ESG (2015), focusing on European Qualification Framework (EQF, 2017) levels 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The EQAVET (2009) reference framework and ENQA-ESG (2015) standards enabled us to develop the Hybrid BEHEALTH model for NVET institutions.

2 SCOPE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR VET INSTITUTIONS

The Quality Assurance Framework is based on the “Mapping and Analysis of Existing Quality Assurance Frameworks for VET”, developed by the BEHEALTH partnership, which identified several EU, International and National frameworks and resources for the quality of VET nursing.

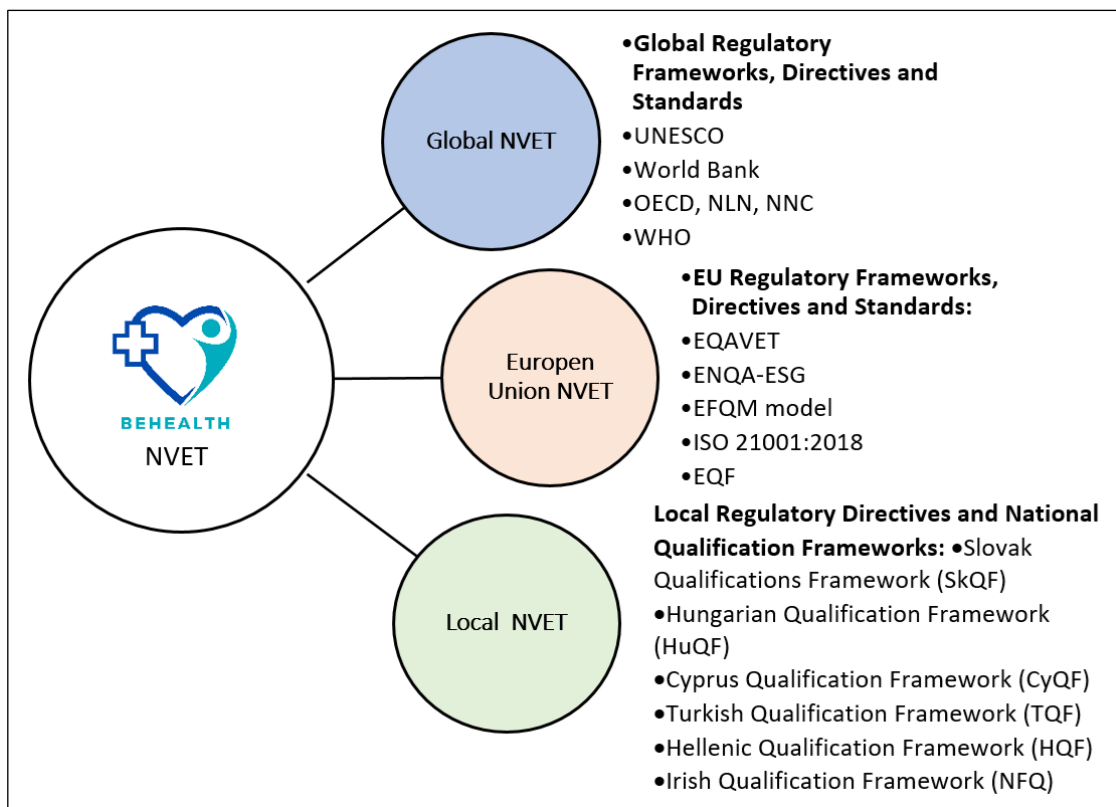


Figure 1 – NVET Regulatory Frameworks, Directives and Standards Structured According to the Different Institutions at the Global, European Union, and National Levels

In this document, we have summarised some of the most important resources suitable for creating a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for VET providers offering nursing qualifications, classified under:

- International level
- European level

2.1 International level

Table 1 – Concept Map for the Quality Assurance Frameworks and Practices in NVET at the Global Level

Concept map for the Global Level				
Key Frameworks	UNESCO-UNEVOC	Purpose Components Flexibility		Promotes international cooperation in VET
	World Bank			Supports VET quality through funding and policy advice
	OECD*			Provides guidelines and benchmarks for VET quality assurance
	WHO*			Prepare nursing graduates for diverse healthcare environments
	WFME			Logic model and data collection are helpful for medical schools planning an institutional self-review and f accrediting authorities wanting to guide schools under their purview
Quality Assurance Cycle	EQAVET – P-I-E-R ENQA-ESG – P-D-S-A	Plan	Plan	Setting objectives and strategies
		Implement	Do	Applying international best practices
		Evaluate	Study	Assessing global VET systems and outcomes
		Review	Act	Updating frameworks based on evaluation results
Indicators and OECD Descriptors	EQAVET ENQA-ESG	Indicators Descriptors		Metrics to measure global quality and performance
	Descriptors			Qualitative descriptions to guide global evaluation
Application Areas	Learning Environments			School-based, work-based learning, apprenticeships, formal, informal, and non-formal provision
	Learning Contexts			Digital, face-to-face, and blended learning
	VET Providers			Public and private sectors
	VET Awards and Qualifications			All levels of the global qualifications framework
Benefits	Continuous Improvement			Ensures ongoing enhancement of global VET systems and providers
	Sustainable Competitiveness			Supports economic growth and social fairness
	Resilience			Enhances the ability to adapt to changes and challenges

2.1.1 International frameworks – standards

Many International frameworks provide guidance on the QA standards to be followed by VET nursing providers. For the purposes of this QAF, the following principles are highlighted:

- VET institutions need to have a **reference guide** in order to facilitate a common understanding about the terminology needed within the field of education and learning services, according to (ISO 29995,2021)

- VET institutions need to have **guidance** on the planning, development, implementation and review process of the quality assessments of outcomes regarding the knowledge, competences and performance indicators of the learning services they provide. VET institutions need to create **assessment procedures adapted for individual learners' outcomes and learner progress**, according to (UNI ISO 29992,2018)
- VET institutions need to demonstrate their ability to **support and facilitate the acquisition and development of competences** through teaching, learning and research methods, according to (ISO 21001,2018)
- VET institutions need to **support individuals and groups in reusing resources and tools**, according to (ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 36)
- VET institutions need to have a **set of common principles** which specify the description of resources (not only learning resources) through the establishment of specific metadata for properties, resource class, vocabularies, application profiles, as well as the rules for governing them, according to (ISO/IEC 19788-1,2024)
- VET institutions need to **enhance the satisfaction** of learners, stakeholders and training staff through an effective management system (EOMS) and **include a conformity assurance and improvement process** for the system and learners' and stakeholders requirements, according to (ISO 29993,2017).

2.1.2 UNESCO 2022-2029 strategy

UNESCO's new strategy (2022-2029) responds to its 2015 initiative, which aims to support and enhance the relevance of NVET systems and equip individuals with the necessary skills for their future employment in the nursing sector. One key action to achieve this result is through the development of a lifelong learning society in order to acknowledge and respond accordingly to the continuous labour market changes and needs. As a result, the NVET system should offer individualised pedagogical learning methods, flexible learning techniques, as well as create new lifelong learning pathways across different educational and activity sectors, recognition and validation procedures for acquired competences and accreditation for non-formal and informal learning and career guidance of NVET students.

For such initiatives, UNESCO proceeded with the establishment of the Global Skills Academy which is dedicated to addressing the gap on labour market skills and empower individuals with lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling opportunities that are essential in navigating the ever-evolving labour market.

Besides the Global Skills Academy, we also have the establishment of an important platform – the International Teacher Task Force (TTF) – a global alliance for teachers, which aims to encourage teacher organizations and other stakeholders to actively participate in the enhancement of quality in education. TTF advocates and supports the right of all individuals to have access and collaborate with highly motivated and skilled teachers. TTF is dedicated in supporting UN's SGD Goal 4 – Ensuring an inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In practice:

In a practical context, these plans (GSA and TTF) could be used and implemented by VET institutions offering nursing qualifications, through the integration of some open-access modules to the curriculum of nursing study programmes, ensuring that individuals gain theoretical knowledge and skills into the use of aids (tools) such as electronic health records.

Moreover, NVET providers could also support nursing educators through their enrolment into TTF training programmes, helping them enhance their techniques at delivering high quality and progressive, student-centred training that's fundamental to the continuously evolving needs of the job market. Besides the provision of training programmes to enhance teacher skills, TTF also supplies several assessment tools to evaluate the performance of teachers and improve their teaching content in accordance with the UNESCO global skills trends and standards.

NVET providers, through the adoption of such initiatives, could potentially set additional benchmarks and quality assurance indicators (mainly for the teachers' skills and teachers' lifelong learning), that would be used to monitor and evaluate teacher and student performance and competences acquisition, leading to a sustained improvement in the educational institutions' internal quality system, over time.

2.1.3 World Federation for Medical Education (WFME)

The WFME was established in 1972 by the following medical organisations: WMA, WHO, IFMSA, JDN, ECFMG and AMEE.

WFME collaborates with doctors, universities and medical educators all over the world, aiming to provide resources and tools to enhance the quality of medical education at a global level. Where WFME is concerned, medical education and training should support in the highest standard the medical workforce, educational institutions that offer medical training and finally, the patients (indirectly) that will be treated by the medical/ nursing professionals.

One of the WFME's key principles is the promotion of accreditation -through its specialised programme- by highlighting and upgrading the quality standards for basic and postgraduate medical education and continuous lifelong learning and competences development.

During 2020, the WFME accreditation programme adopted a specialised approach to allow the integration of the global quality standards into a national context.

The table below presents the WFME standards that are based on the Basic Medical Education aspect of the global expert consensus, intended for use by education providers supporting medical academic staff and nursing students:

Table 2 – WFME Standards

Standard	Basic Medical Education
S1	Mission and Values
S2	Curriculum
S3	Assessment
S4	Students
S5	Academic staff
S6	Educational resources
S7	Quality Assurance
S8	Governance and Administration

In practice:

In the context of the Erasmus+ “BEHEALTH” project, the implementation of such standards into an institutional quality assurance system would mean a series of steps to ensure the continuous improvement of the organisation. These steps are the following:

- Stating the mission, its values and main goals: Institutions should make a public statement briefly describing their mission, values and educational goals, along with information on the collaboration between them and the healthcare sector and inform them constantly.
- Defining in detail the educational profile: Institutions -through the development of their curriculum- should provide all relevant information about the study programmes m regarding entry and admission requirements, programme structure, support and evaluation system. Also, NVET providers should offer training opportunities for teachers to learn how to provide the best individual educational experience.
- Definition of learning outcomes: Institutions should define in detail the learning outcomes expected to have been achieved by nursing students when approaching graduation, as well as the specific learning outcomes for each topic of the training programme.
- Inclusion of specified content: Institutions should include relevant theoretical and practical sources needed by nursing students to prepare them for their future role in the medical field and further learning and achieve the expected learning outcomes.
- Provision of feedback system: Institutions should develop an assessment that offers regular and practical feedback to nursing students – identifying their strong and weak attributes and providing relevant guidance and support.
- Provision of assessment system: Institutions should develop an assessment that gathers and analyses data regarding student’s progression, measuring the positive support of the course learning outcomes. This part can also be served through the 360-degree assessment tool that will be developed in the framework of BEHEALTH.
- Provision of support services: Institutions should provide a plethora of support services in regard to academic, financial and career guidance procedures to nursing students raising the quality of the offered services.

- Professional development policy statement: Institutions should share an internal statement about the expected performance of its medical academic staff, as well as a policy regarding their lifelong learning and professional development.
- Provision of adequate educational resources: Institutions should develop and provide adequate methods of teaching and learning processes, to ensure the achievement of the desired learning outcomes.
- Implementation of centralised quality assurance system: Institutions should ensure the implementation of appropriate centralised quality assurance procedures that address the educational, administrative and research aspects, as well as compliance with the mission, values and curriculum.
- Defined governance structure: Institutions should provide a defined governance structure with information regarding the teaching, learning and allocation of resources components that align with the mission statement and general institutional function and are subsequently accessible to all stakeholders.

2.2 European level

The European Commission, European bodies, EQAVET. and ENQA put in the spotlight the Quality of the provided Education at vocational and HE level and are working on improving and harmonising quality standards at European level. Several documents and resources are published over the past few years towards this direction, from which the following were selected in order to complete this QAF.

In general:

- Vocational education and training (VET) provides students with the necessary skills and competences, facilitating their future employability and supporting their personal and professional development in order to respond to the economic and labour market needs. (European Commission).
- Quick adaptability of VET sector to the labour market needs is also highlighted by the European Council, along with the provision of high-quality learning opportunities (upskilling and reskilling) with inclusive practices, as well as establishment of a space for the rights contributions on the topics of sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. (European Council)

2.2.1 EQAVET

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) was established by the European Parliament and Council, serving as a supporting mechanism for quality assurance in VET across Europe.

The EQAVET framework operates in a cycle consisting of 4 levels -planning, implementation, evaluation and review- as well as a range of relevant QA indicators that apply at both VET system and provider levels.

Rather than dictating a specific quality approach, it offers a set of common principles, descriptors and indicators aimed at facilitating the assessment and enhancement of the VET quality procedures. Thus, the EQAVET framework can be viewed as a 'toolkit' which was developed to provide user-friendly resources to support countries with their national implementation approaches, by adopting the most relevant descriptors and indicators for the QA system.

The EQAVET framework can be applied to boost the quality assurance of the following environments:

- Learning environments (school education, work-based learning, apprenticeships etc.)
- Learning contexts (face-to-face, digital, blended format)
- VET providers (public/ private sector)
- VET qualifications and awards at all levels

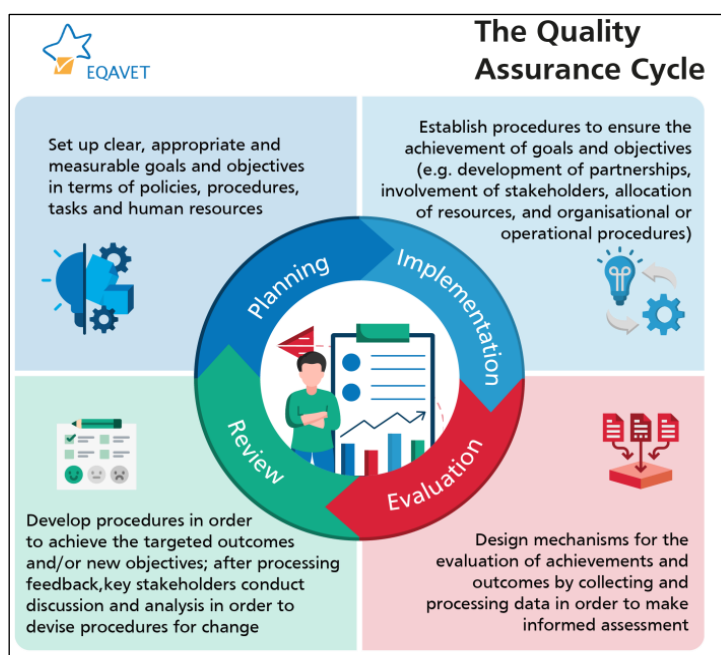


Figure 2 – EQAVET Quality Assurance cycle, European Commission

The EQAVET 'toolkit' supports the 2 Council recommendations (2020¹,2022²) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience and explains further the significance of the provided indicators.

¹ Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience 2020/C 417/01 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29>

² EQAVET Secretariat report - How often each indicator is being used in initial and continuing VET <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26890&langId=en>

The most important indicators used to assess quality in VET are the following:

- Indicator 1: Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers
- Indicator 2: Investment in training of teachers and trainers
- Indicator 3: Participation rate in VET programmes
- Indicator 4: Completion rate in VET programmes
- Indicator 5: Placement rate of graduates from VET programmes
- Indicator 6: Utilization of acquired skills at the workplace
- Indicator 7: Unemployment rate in the country
- Indicator 8: Prevalence of vulnerable groups
- Indicator 9: Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market
- Indicator 10: Schemes used to promote better access to VET and provide guidance to (potential) VET learners

The framework's QA procedure, based on time sequence and according to the EQAVET QA cycle is as follows:

- Planning phase (set measurable goals aligned with national and sectoral requirements)
- Design phase (establish new educational procedures, such as curricula development, and assessment strategies)
- Implementation phase (ensure achievements through education and training delivery techniques in accordance with the International and European standards)
- Monitoring phase (monitoring procedures in order to track student progress, learning outcomes and feedback gathering)
- Evaluation phase (assess goals and achievements through analysing performance and identify areas for improvement)
- Processing phase (collect data)
- Review phase (analyse data through periodic reviews with internal and external stakeholders)
- Improvement phase (devise enhancement procedures and implement changes based on quality and effectiveness)

In practice:

In the context of the Erasmus+ “BEHEALTH” project, an internal quality assurance system (IQAS) could be adopted through the adaptation of the EQAVET framework, following the key steps listed below:

- **Understand the EQAVET Framework:** The EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) framework is structured around a Quality Assurance and Improvement cycle, comprising four phases: planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision.
- **Define Clear Objectives:** Start by establishing clear and measurable goals and objectives for your quality assurance system. These should align with the EQAVET framework and your organisation's specific needs.
- **Identify Key Indicators:** Identify key indicators that will help you measure the effectiveness of your quality assurance system. These indicators should cover various aspects of your organisation's operations, such as teaching quality, student satisfaction, and resource management.
- **Develop the Survey Questions:** Create a survey statement that includes declarations related to the identified key indicators. Ensure that the questions are clear, concise, and relevant to your objectives. You can use a mix of quantitative (e.g., rating scales) and qualitative (e.g., open-ended questions) formats. To this end, you can use the questions included in the present document and/or the digital 360-degree assessment tool of BEHEALTH.
- **Pilot Testing:** Before rolling out the questionnaire, conduct a pilot test with a small group of stakeholders to identify any issues and make necessary adjustments.
- **Collect Data:** Distribute the questionnaire to the relevant stakeholders, such as staff, students, and external partners. Ensure that the data collection process is transparent and that respondents understand the purpose of the questionnaire. When collecting data do not forget to get feedback on the 10 indicators set in the EQAVET toolkit.
- **Analyse Data:** Analyse the collected data to assess the performance of your quality assurance system. Look for patterns, strengths, and areas for improvement.
- **Review and Improve:** Based on the analysis, review your quality assurance system and make necessary improvements. This may involve revising procedures, providing additional training, or reallocating resources.
- **Document and Report:** Document the findings and actions taken as a result of the self-assessment. Prepare a report that can be shared with stakeholders and used for future reference.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Finally, ensure that the self-assessment process is ongoing and that your quality assurance system is continuously monitored and improved.

2.2.2 ENQA ESG (2015)

The European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) was established in 2000 and advocates for the promotion of European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in higher education (EHEA). ENQA's main goal is to facilitate the maintenance and improvement of quality of EU Higher Education, serving as an important catalyst for the development of quality assurance that signed on the Bologna process. It focuses on 3 primary topics:

- Advocating for the interests of QA agencies
- Offering services to its members and stakeholders
- Promoting the enhancement of external quality assurance

ENQA acknowledges the diversity of HE systems and adheres to the following core values:

- Integrity: ENQA acts in an equitable and impartial manner when consulting with its members and other associations.
- Transparency: ENQA operates with clear policies, sharing its decisions and reports about each initiative to the general public.
- Independence: ENQA is accountable solely to its members, having an independent review process.
- Social responsibility: ENQA acknowledges the social responsibility factor in the development processes, promoting its role in quality assurance procedures and contribution in the United Nations SDG's through stakeholder engagement.

The Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in EHEA (ESG) were established and adopted in 2015, providing an additional set of principles for quality assurance in an internal and external context. The ENQA-ESG standards are intended to be used in HE, regardless of place or delivery. This set of standards outlines the important practices and guidelines for their implementation, depending on context.

In practice:

The ENQA-ESG framework can be embedded in an internal quality assurance system consisting of the following sub-standards:

- Policy for quality assurance: Institutions should establish a public QA system that is integrated into its strategic management.
- Design and approval of programmes: Institutions should design and approve of their training programmes with an intension of achieving the already established learning outcomes.
- Students-centred learning, teaching and assessment: Institutions should motivate their students to actively participate in the learning process.
- Students' admission, progression, recognition and certification: Institutions should enforce available regulations, covering all educational phases, such as admission procedures, certification etc.

- Teaching staff: Institutions should ensure that VET teachers and trainers possess the necessary skills and competences.
- Learning resources and student support: Institutions should secure sufficient means of financial support for their initiatives and guarantee the availability and proper access to learning resources and assistance.
- Information management: Institutions should ensure the gathering, analysing and application of relevant information to manage their training programmes and other activities in an effective way.
- Public information: Institutions should share details about their activities, training programmes in a clear and precise manner, ensuring their proper accessibility.
- On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes: Institutions should monitor and assess their study programmes to confirm the achievement of the established learning outcomes and address the requirements already set for their students, which then will provide opportunities for continuous enhancement of the training programmes.
- Cyclical external quality assurance: Institutions should participate in external quality assurance procedures in accordance with the general ESG standards on a relatively regular basis.

2.2.3 European Federation of Nurses (EFN)

The EFN was established in 1971 representing over 36 national nurses' associations and promoting the engagement of approximately 9 million nurses across Europe. EFN's mission is to improve nursing practices, ensuring the interests of both the healthcare sector and healthcare professionals (nurses).

EFN has a key role in empowering nurses by supporting their education in addressing environmental changes and design/implementing healthcare solutions. It advocates for synergies between the European Union, the European Council and the World Health Organization.

Consequently, it provides a broad platform for the development of health and social policies in a European context, by supporting the European Union decision making process in the areas where the nursing profession is addressed.

EFN insists that a comprehensive process needs to be established for nurses in order to provide and then disseminate clear information and resources to help patients in making informed decisions regarding their health. EFN has created and published several policy documents that connect with the Quality and Safety aspects of the nursing profession, such as the EFN policy and position statements regarding quality and safety standards. While in line with the EU Patient's rights in cross-border healthcare directive, the EFN states that high quality standards are essential to achieve healthcare excellence.

Therefore, the Federation supports among others:

- Set up of a European network of quality and safety standards to develop clear guidelines in the care sector

- Engagement of healthcare professionals and patients in the design and implementation phases of the guidelines
- Dissemination of the EU principles for the subsequent adoption into national approaches

More specifically and in the context of the BEHEALTH project initiative, the EFN adopted in 2015 the EFN Competence framework, which describes the skills nurses need to acquire with regard to general care. The framework's purpose is to be disseminated in a national context to nurses' associations and encourage them to implement these competences to nursing schools.

The EFN Competence framework is based on the amended version of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (Directive 2013/55/EU), which was adopted in 2013 and included a set of competences that set the minimum educational requirements for nurses that are responsible for providing general care. The correlation between these two initiatives is shown in the below table:

Table 3 – EU and EFN competences

EU Directive (2013/55/EU)	EFN Competence framework
Provide independent diagnosis using current theoretical/ clinical knowledge	CA3 – Decision making CA5 – Research, development and leadership CA6 – Nursing care
Ensure effective teamwork	CA4 – Communication and teamwork
Ensure and promote individuals' empowerment for a healthier lifestyle	CA2 – Health promotion, prevention, guidance and training
Carry out measures for crisis and disaster situations	CA6 – Nursing care
Advise and support individuals needing care	CA6 – Nursing care
Ensure quality and assessment of nursing care	CA3 – Decision making
Communicate and cooperate comprehensively with other health professionals	CA4 – Communication and teamwork CA5 – Research, development and leadership
Analyse and improve quality of professional practice	CA1 – Culture, Ethics and Values

NVET institutions need to develop and incorporate into their educational content and training curricula the EFN competences, which will allow further assessment on the achievement of the established learning outcomes.

NVET institutions must establish guidelines to ensure the continuous improvement of competences for both training staff and students. The guidelines should outline a more structured and cohesive process for reviewing training curricula in alignment with current healthcare practices, digital tools and methods and industry requirements.

Simultaneously, they must prioritize the professional development of training staff through targeted upskilling initiatives and certifications, ensuring that the latter reflect up-to-date clinical and pedagogical practices and skills. By systematically enhancing both curricula and staff competencies, NVET institutions can effectively transform and enhance their provision of training, producing nursing graduates with important accreditation standards.

3 QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR VET INSTITUTIONS

The below figure schematically presents the proposed Quality Assurance Framework for VET institutions providing nursing qualifications, which is prepared based on the information and resources derived from above.

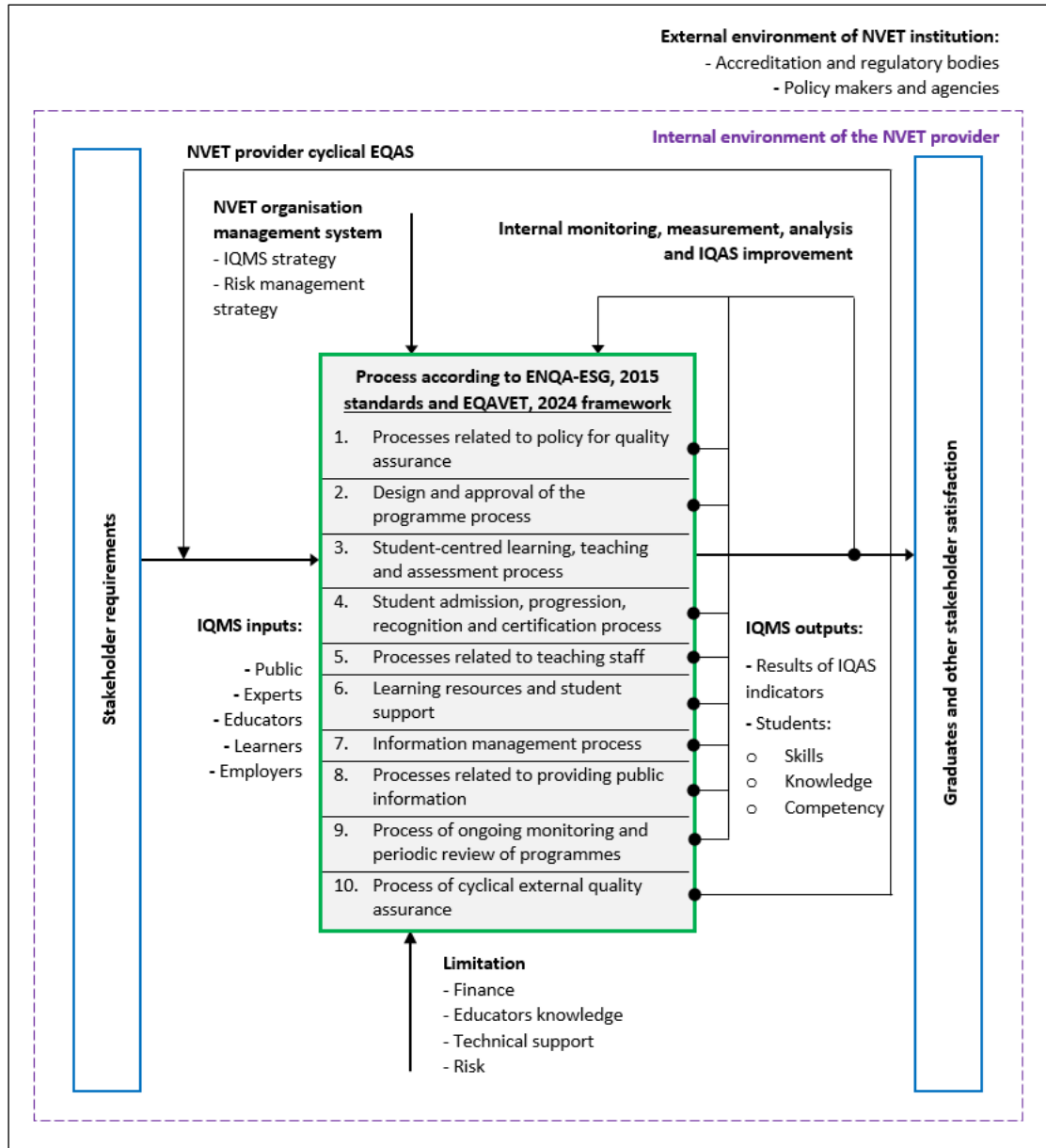


Figure 3 – QA Framework for NVET providers

This model of Quality Assurance Framework should be located in an external support environment that recognizes the importance of continuous development and improvement of the quality assurance aspect of education, as well as enables further the goals and objectives to be achieved, already established by the institution.

External environment comprised of: - QA support from the adoption of international and European standards, - Updated QA procedures at a national level

Components of the NVET Quality Assurance Framework:

- **External environment:** It is assumed that there are already established QA procedures in a national context, as well as that VET providers have set their own additional internal quality assurance practices and principles.
- **Management and Monitoring:** this process ensures that the educational goals and objectives meet student's learning needs and requirements, secures the effectiveness and efficiency of strategic thinking on risk management and exploits and works with the knowledge and skills from expert VET educators, preparing nursing trainees to contribute to the development and enhancement of the nursing profession within society. Further objectives are their encouragement towards lifelong learning opportunities, facilitation of the creation of interesting study programmes and learning environments, as well as the development of high-quality competences.

Regarding the design and approval of nursing programmes, this process ensures that continuous quality assurance procedures will be implemented through validation processes, designed to meet student's requirements and learning needs.

Concerning the same kind of process related to educators, it ensures a greater understanding and focus towards enhanced pedagogical qualifications, and their institutional recognition.

Moreover, the Quality Assurance Framework created and presented in this section is based upon information acquired by the ENQA-ESG 2015 standards. Specifically:

- For the **Processes related to policy for quality assurance** aspect, institutions should focus more on the continuous maintenance of a clear quality assurance policy, aligned with EU standards, as well as nursing education requirements. Additionally, NVET providers should adopt regular audit procedures to assess and incorporate improvements regarding compliance with international and national regulations, ensuring their relevance with evolving demands.
- For the **Design and approval of the programme process** aspect, institutions should focus on incorporating input from educators and regulatory bodies through a more structured and collaborative approach. They should adopt a more transparent approval process, with internal and external reviews needed to verify the relevance and learning outcomes and objectives of the programmes.
- For the **Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment process** aspect, institutions should focus more on prioritising the active engagement of students, as well as their continuous competency development, based on current accreditation criteria and practices. Also, the assessment processes should be transparent and completely aligned with the already established learning outcomes, ensuring effective evaluation of their knowledge and practical skills.

- For the **Student admission, progression, recognition and certification process** aspect, institutions should focus more on maintaining clearly defined admission criteria and processes, which are aligned with the programme's demands, while also tracking the academic progression of students about learning and qualifications advancements. They should also adopt a standardised certification process that ensures the validation of their knowledge and professional competencies.
- For the **Processes relating to teaching staff** aspect, institutions should focus on the efficient recruitment and selection criteria of educators that are aligned with academic and clinical standards, as well as current pedagogical innovative practices. They should also adopt regular performance evaluations in order to encourage continuous personal and professional improvements, ensuring that the teaching staff are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies.
- For the **Learning resources and student support** aspect, institutions should focus on guaranteeing students access to high quality educational material, as well as consistent assistance all through their training years. They should also guarantee the regular review and evaluation process of their learning resources, ensuring the materials meet current industry standards and correspond to the knowledge and practical competences outlined in the learning outcomes. NVET providers should also make sure that academic advisors as well as mental health counsellors are accessible, to facilitate personal and professional development. Institutions should also adopt the necessary feedback processes and assessments to ensure that all the learning resources and support services provided respond to student needs and requirements.
- For the **Information management process** aspect, institutions should establish secure systems for the collection, storage and analysis of personal data used in decision making and improvement processes. NVET providers should guarantee that this process is effective in securely collecting, maintaining and using personal data of teachers and students - including academic records, progress tracking, and feedback evaluations-, complying with the necessary EU data protection regulations.
- For the **Processes related to providing public information** aspect, institutions should prioritise the transparency and accuracy of the information related to performance and quality of the nursing programmes. They should proactively publish information regarding accreditation processes, program outcomes, and related data, in their official channels in a clear and timely manner. NVET providers should also regularly update their data and adopt feedback mechanisms to handle public inquiries and/or concerns.
- For the **Process of ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes** aspect, institutions should focus on ensuring that the nursing qualifications they provide are relevant and align well with current healthcare standards. They should also adopt a tracking system for factors such as student performance and employer feedback, which must be regularly reviewed and evaluated. NVET providers should commit to the timely improvement of pedagogical practices and high-quality learning resources.

- For the **Process of cyclical external quality assurance** aspect, institutions should focus on undergoing external evaluation in order to validate their compliance with national, international and EU standards. Due to national and EU criteria and regulations, institutions should go through periodic external reviews by national accreditation bodies, certifying their compliance with all key aspects of their nursing programme design and delivery, among others.

Inputs:

The stakeholder inputs for the above QA framework process are:

- Experts in the nursing profession who provide their professional opinions and expertise
- Educators trained in creating and implementing the nursing courses
- Students that are involved in the learning process and educational materials
- Employers in the healthcare system
- General public

Outcomes:

The outcomes of the above QA framework process should be:

- High quality knowledge: knowledge that a learner is expected to acquire and demonstrate upon completing a learning process. The learning outcomes derived from such procedures should be established and shown in a clear, measurable manner and aligned with the goals and objectives set by the educational course.
- Enhanced skills: the ability of an individual to accurately apply the knowledge gained by an educational programme or initiative and perform certain and relevant tasks and professional activities.
- Enhanced professional competencies: the proven ability of an individual to perform relevant tasks and professional activities.

Knowledge, skills and competencies are an essential component of the learning outcomes.

Limitations:

Finance, the lack of expert knowledge, several risk aspects and internal/external support can limit significantly the process of developing and implementing advanced quality assurance practices.

3.1 How to enhance your QA Framework according to EU and International standards

Based on the input from International and European standards, BEHEALTH proposes the following principles for the enhancement of a QA Framework for NVET providers.

The **core components** of this QA framework include **key steps** that guide the implementation, and continuous improvement of nursing education in a VET context. These components are divided as follows:

1. Strategy

NVET providers should establish clear roles and responsibilities to promote effective and efficient decision-making and resource allocation. Also, VET institutions should make sure to always apply and adhere to regulations, guidelines and accreditation requirements for the provision and assessment of qualifications for both teaching staff and learners according to National, International and EU standards.

2. Curriculum

NVET providers should offer a balanced curriculum providing theoretical knowledge and practical training in nursing practices.

3. Teaching and Learning

NVET providers need to use modern pedagogical methods and include innovative practical tools, such as simulations, case studies and digital learning techniques. NVET providers must guarantee the continuous training and overall professional development of their teaching staff, including the continuous enhancement of their qualifications and pedagogical skills. Lastly, VET institutions need to offer and continuously improve their student support services by offering comprehensive means of educational, financial and career and mental health guidance opportunities to nursing students.

4. Assessment and Evaluation

NVET providers should establish and ensure the efficiency of structured feedback gathering system that incorporates information from all target groups – students, teaching staff and all other stakeholders.

5. Educational Resources

NVET providers need to make certain that all teaching and learning materials are up-to-date and these materials as well as the necessary innovative digital tools and clinical equipment are accessible as required.

3.2 Wellbeing and Mental health survey interconnected with the ENQA ESG 2015 standards

3.2.1 Influencing factors for nursing students

A high-quality nursing study program balances academic rigour with support, clinical experience, mental health resources, and self-care strategies that can significantly improve nursing students' mental health and overall well-being (Talley, 2024).

Key factors are as follows (Campbell, et al., 2022):

- **Academic Pressure:** Nursing programs often involve rigorous coursework and clinical rotations, which can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety. Programs that balance academic demands with adequate support can help mitigate these pressures.
- **Supportive Environment:** A supportive learning environment that fosters strong relationships between students, faculty, and peers can promote better mental health. Programs that prioritise mental health discussions and provide resources for support tend to have more positive outcomes.
- **Clinical Placements:** The quality of clinical placements and the support provided during these placements are crucial. Positive experiences in clinical settings can enhance students' confidence and reduce stress, while negative experiences can have the opposite effect.
- **Mental Health Literacy:** Programs that educate students about mental health and provide resources for mental health support can prevent poor mental health and ensure targeted support for students at increased risk.
- **Social Networks:** Developing strong and supportive social networks within the study program can promote mental well-being. Programs that facilitate social interactions and community building can help students feel more connected and supported.

The overview provided in the 1st result – Mapping and analysis of the QA practices and frameworks for VET in nursing, relevant to different levels of VET education and all EQF levels, suggests that recognition of the need for mechanisms that allow nursing students to express their feelings related to their mental health level concerning the study programme, is missing.

Many HEIs providing NVET use well-being and mental health surveys to improve the quality of their study programme, *e.g. University of Edinburgh, Scotland; University of Copenhagen, Denmark; University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; University of Zurich, Switzerland* (Cuppen, et al., 2024), but in the project partner countries, they are not part of QA standards.

Although no specific information is available on every higher education institution providing NVET in Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Turkey conducting well-being and mental health surveys specifically for their nursing programmes, many universities in these countries conduct general mental health surveys among their students.

3.2.2 Guidelines for the development of a Wellbeing and Mental health survey

Step 1: Define Objectives: Clearly outline the goals of the survey. Are you aiming to assess overall well-being, mental health, stress levels, and/or specific aspects of their educational experience?

Step 2: Identify Stakeholders: Determine who will provide feedback. This can include:

- Self-assessment: The nursing students themselves.
- Peers: Fellow vocational and educational nursing students.
- Instructors: Educators and mentors.
- Patients: Patients they interact with during clinical rotations.
- Nurses: Registered nurses and other healthcare professionals' work.
- Employers: Future employers of graduates.
- Alumni: Graduates of the study program

Step 3: Develop the Survey: Create a survey covering various well-being and mental health domains. Include questions on stress, anxiety, depression, work-life balance, support systems, and overall satisfaction with the educational program.

Step 4: Ensure Anonymity and Confidentiality: Ensure the feedback process is anonymous to encourage honest and open responses. Assure participants that their responses will be kept confidential.

Step 5: Collect and Analyse Data: Distribute the survey to all identified stakeholders and collect the responses. Analyse the data to identify trends, areas of concern, and strengths.

Step 6: Provide Feedback and Support: Share the results with the nursing students and stakeholders. Use the feedback to provide targeted support and interventions. This could include mental health resources, stress management workshops, or changes to the curriculum.

Step 7: Follow-Up: Conduct follow-up surveys periodically to track progress and make continuous improvements.

3.2.3 Wellbeing and Mental health survey

The below statements (Table 4) are going to be evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4 – Mental health and Well-being survey statements

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I feel comfortable attending the VET institution/ University daily					
2	I find it easy to initiate conversations with classmates or teachers/ training staff					
3	I feel safe expressing my emotions to others at the VET institution/ University					
4	I have struggled to make friends at the VET institution/ University					
5	I often feel lonely or isolated at the VET institution/ University					
6	I frequently feel overwhelmed by my emotions					
7	I generally have control over my emotions					
8	I experience physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g. racing heart, sweating palms)					
9	I feel anxious about social interactions at the VET institution/ University					
10	I feel anxious about meeting academic expectations					
11	My workload overwhelms me					
12	I sometimes feel inadequate or like an imposter in my academics					
13	Teachers support me in managing academic challenges					
14	I feel pressured by peers to perform academically					
15	I struggle with time management for schoolwork					
16	I have healthy strategies to cope with academic stress (e.g. exercise, hobbies)					
17	I often distract myself to avoid stress or anxiety					
18	My coping mechanisms effectively reduce my stress					
19	I adapt well to unexpected changes or challenges					
20	I am satisfied with my physical appearance					
21	Dressing how I like boosts my confidence					
22	I feel pressured to change myself to fit in					
23	I compare myself to others frequently					
24	I practice self-care routines (e.g. mindfulness, hobbies) regularly					
25	I have set personal goals for my mental well-being					

4 CONCLUSIONS

The Quality Assurance Framework for NVET providers integrates international and European standards with practical guidelines, based on the EQAVET Quality Assurance cycle and the ENQA-ESF 2015 standards, towards more efficient QA practices. The document outlines key benchmarks but also practical guidelines on how VET providers can adapt them to their institutional needs.

European Quality Assurance reference framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) supports quality assurance in VET across Europe through a continuous improvement cycle. It helps systems and providers enhance education and training. It provides a flexible framework based on a quality assurance and improvement cycle: planning – implementation – evaluation – review (P-I-E-R), along with various descriptors and indicators for both VET systems and VET provider levels.

ENQA-ESF (2015) standards, formally known as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, support a robust framework for both internal and external quality assurance in higher education. They are central to the Bologna Process goals of transparency, mobility, and mutual recognition across Europe.

The Implementation involves upgrading existing quality assurance processes with partnership support, helping NVET institutions achieve both immediate and long-term goals. While the first and more immediate beneficiaries will be NVET institutions from the partner countries, the framework is, nevertheless, aligned with the European standards, allowing its use in all EU countries, and ensuring that these procedures serve as a practical tool and not just as theoretical concepts.

The evaluation phase supports NVET providers to use the 360-degree assessment tool for a detailed analysis of their educational processes. The final step is a review phase, during which NVET providers can reflect, discuss, and develop new quality mechanisms.

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