POWERED BY EQAVET 4.0

The EQonomist



A VIEW FROM THE INDUSTRY:

WHAT EMPLOYERS TOLD US THEY NEED

The Soft Skills Paradox
One Year of EQAVET 4.0
Greece: The Centralization Bottleneck

Co-funded by the European Union

EQAVET 4.0
for quality in outcome-oriented VET

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What is EQAVET4.0?
EQAVET4.0 is a forward-looking initiative driven by the long-standing work with the EQAVET framework, quality assurance, and the continuous development of Vocational Education and Training (VET) across Europe.

What makes EQAVET4.0 relevant today?
Building on years of practical experience and policy alignment, the project responds to the increasing need for VET systems that are more flexible, data-informed, and closely connected to real labour-market demands.

The project brings together experts from the labour market, innovation ecosystems, digital transformation, and public authorities to jointly rethink how quality assurance in VET can better support learners, providers, and employers in a rapidly changing world of work.

What is the goal of EQAVET4.0?
Our goal is to bridge policy, practice, and innovation, ensuring that VET systems remain trustworthy, agile, and truly relevant for learners and the labour market alike.

YULIA KOZHUKHIVSKA
EQAVET 4.0
COORDINATOR



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EQAVET 4.0
for quality in outcome-oriented VET



The First Candle: One Year of EQAVET 4.0

It is February 2026. We are exactly one year into EQAVET 4.0. The honeymoon phase is over. The excitement of kick-off meeting and shared ambitions has matured into something more demanding and more meaningful.

From the very beginning, EQAVET 4.0 set out to do more than refine quality assurance language. We committed to building a VET LOOP: a continuous, outcome oriented feedback cycle connecting labour market needs, occupational profiles, VET provision, and evaluation. What WP2 has made unmistakably clear is that the long - discussed disconnect between education and employment is caused not by the lack of motivation. VET providers want relevance. Employers want skilled graduates. Learners want meaningful jobs.

The real problem is structural: a lack of shared mechanisms, common language, and systematic processes that allow these actors to work together in a sustained way.

“ The real problem is structural: a lack of shared mechanisms, common language, and systematic processes that allow these actors to work together in a sustained way.”

The Sectoral Analysis in partner countries has reflected the common challenge - the employer engagement which typically relies on personal networks and informal contacts rather than being embedded in a structured, institutionalised processes. Only few VET providers use systematic mechanisms such as formal agreements, joint curriculum design, or regular employer consultations.

This is exactly where EQAVET4.0 by turning failures of the structure to the evidenced action. The VET LOOP we are building is not a concept, it is a commitment to redesign how VET systems listen, adapt, and improve. We mark this first anniversary with a renewed sense of purpose. While the structural challenges are significant, the commitment of every partner demonstrates a shared belief in a better future for VET.

EQAVET 4.0 is more than a project. It is a movement towards a connected ecosystem.

A View from the Industry: What Employers Told Us They Need

Why Employers Now Hire for Learning Speed, Not Knowledge Depth

A VIEW FROM THE INDUSTRY - WHAT IS REALLY CHANGING BY 2026

A quiet but profound shift is taking place in recruitment rooms across Europe and beyond. Employers are still interested in what candidates know, but that question is no longer the decisive one. Increasingly, the conversation turns to something else: how fast someone can learn once the job changes. And the job will change.

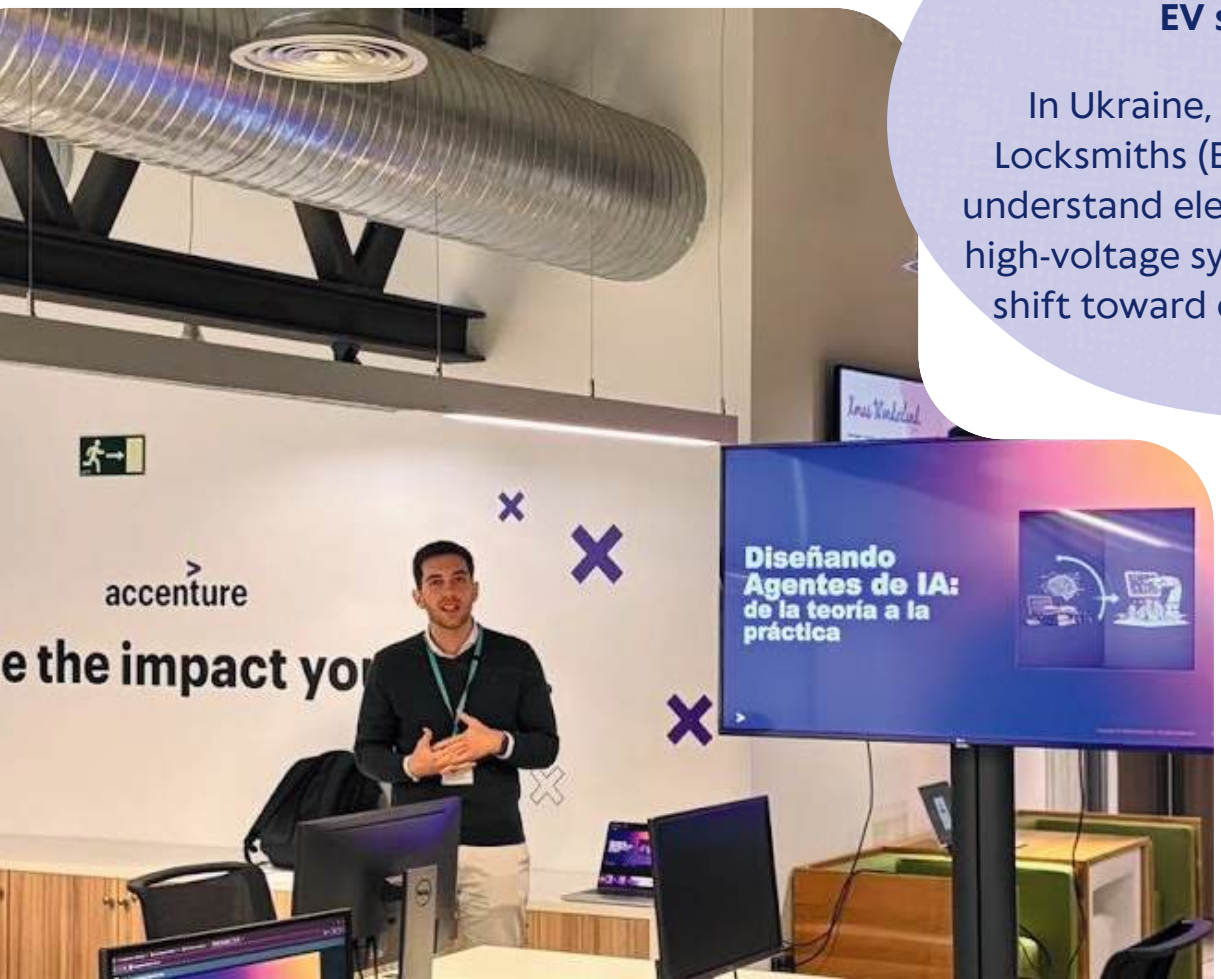
By 2030, most roles will look noticeably different from how they looked when today's job descriptions were written. Digital systems are updated continuously. Artificial intelligence is integrated into everyday workflows.

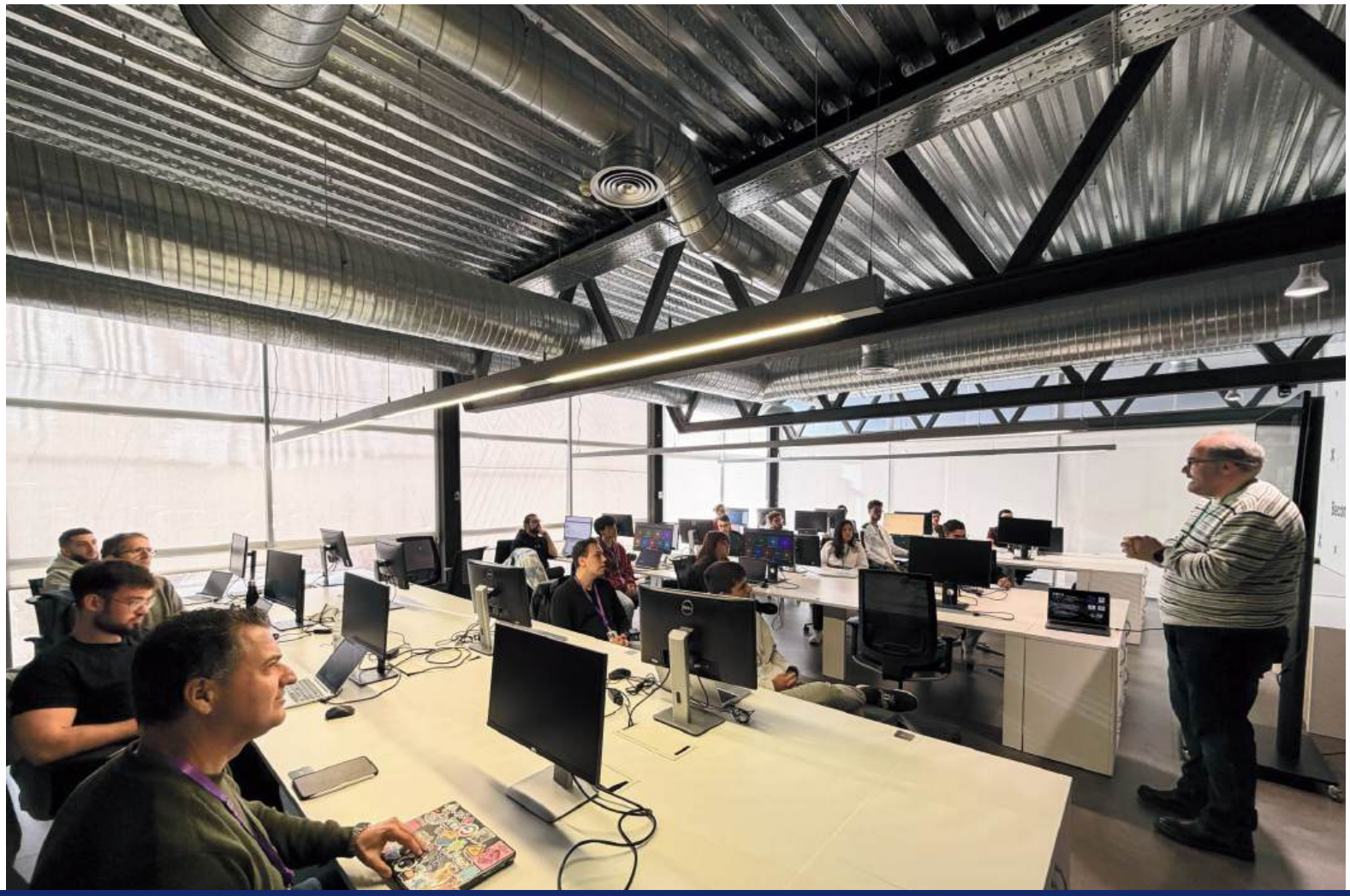
Green transition policies reshape operational priorities. Regulation changes faster than training cycles. In this context, employers are not hiring for a fixed role. They are hiring for movement.

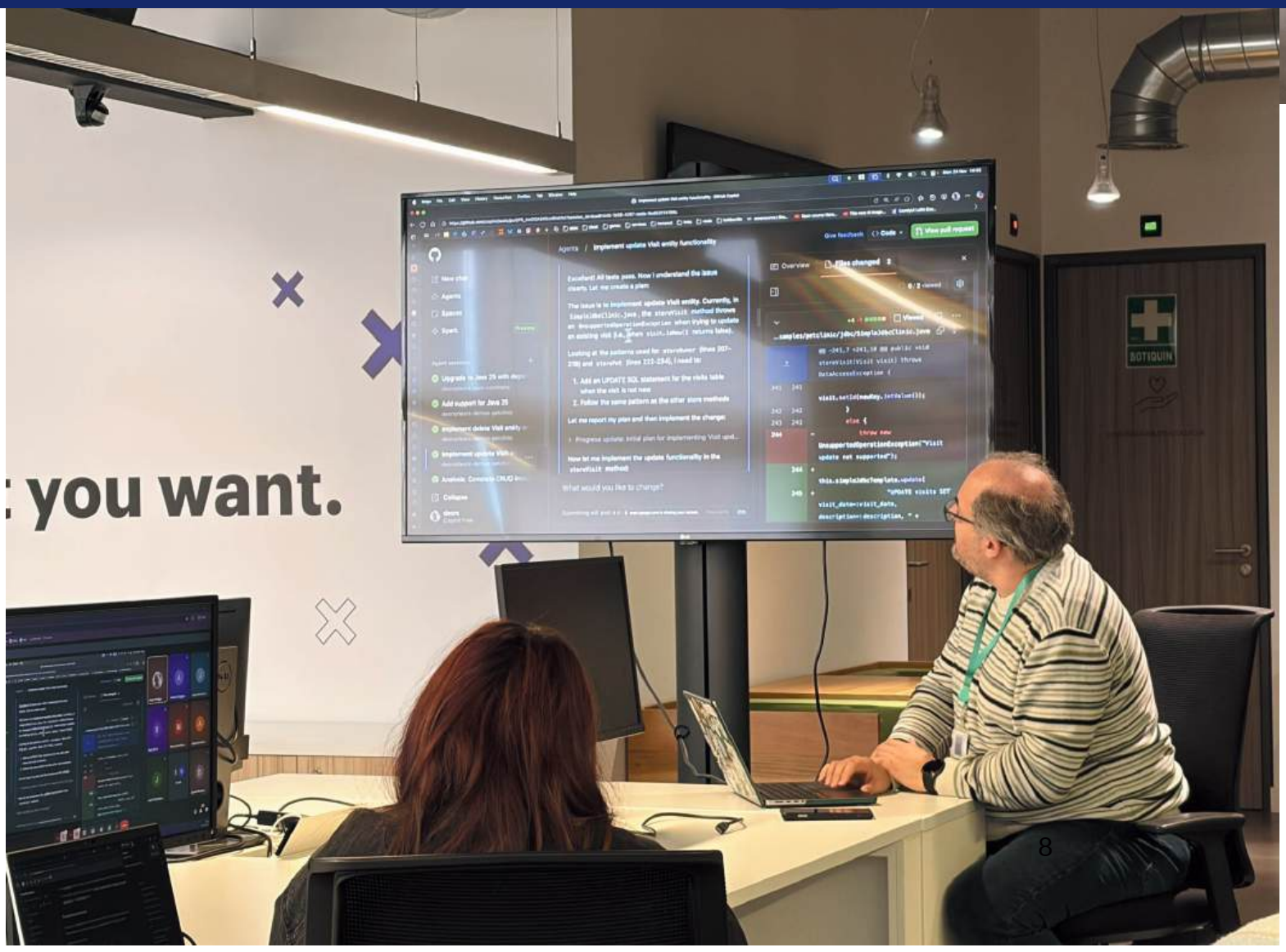
Did you know ...

...even basic mechanics now need EV skills?

In Ukraine, Vehicle Repair Locksmiths (EQF 3) must now understand electrical safety and high-voltage systems due to the shift toward electric vehicles.






you want.

SKILLS ARE CHANGING FASTER THAN RECRUITMENT SYSTEMS

Large scale employer surveys already point in the same direction. The World Economic Forum (2025), drawing on responses from over 1,000 employers representing more than 14 million workers, reports that employers expect 39 percent of workers' core skills to change by 2030. That is not a gentle drift. It is a constant rewrite of what "qualified" means.
For employers, this creates a practical problem. Hiring someone who is highly specialised but slow to adapt carries increasing risk. Knowledge depth still matters, particularly in technical and safety critical fields. However, knowledge now has a shorter lifespan. A tool learned today may be outdated tomorrow. A process mastered this year may be automated next year. What remains valuable is the ability to absorb change without losing effectiveness. This is why learning speed has become a strategic hiring criterion. Employers want people who can enter a role, understand the logic of the work, and then continue developing as the role evolves.



Did you know ...

...curriculum changes can take up to three years?

In Lithuania, formal updates to national VET curricula may take as long as three years, while technology and workplace tools evolve much faster.

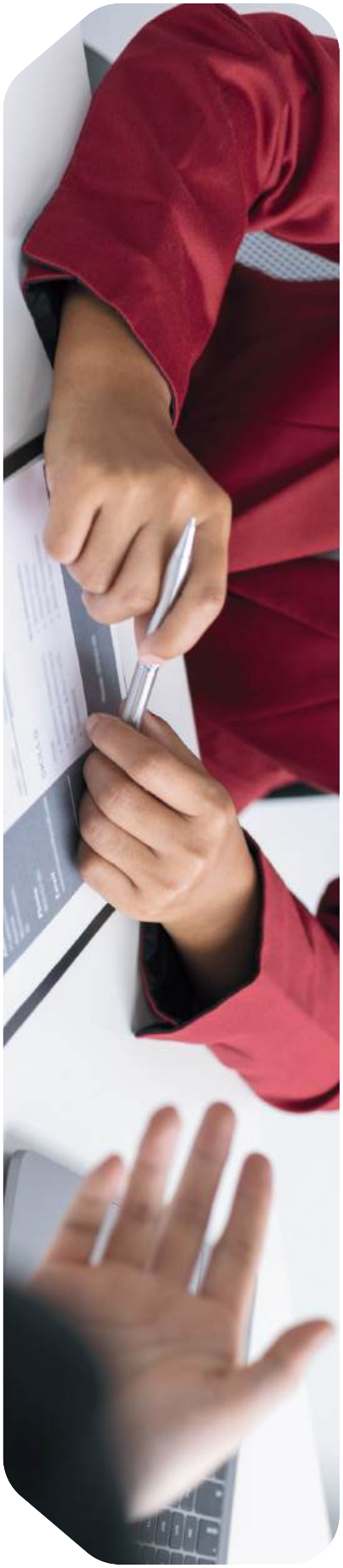
WHAT EMPLOYERS ACTUALLY MEAN BY LEARNING SPEED

When employers talk about learning speed, they are not referring to how quickly someone can complete an online course. They are talking about behaviour in real working conditions.

Learning speed means the ability to:

- understand unfamiliar systems without constant supervision
- apply new knowledge while continuing to deliver results
- adjust working methods when tools or priorities change
- recognise when previous habits are no longer effective
- learn from mistakes without becoming defensive

This is also why employers are increasingly sceptical of purely credential based signalling. A certificate can show exposure. It does not always show adaptability.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAS CHANGED WHAT COMPETENCE LOOKS LIKE

One of the strongest drivers of this shift is the widespread introduction of artificial intelligence into everyday work. AI has not replaced most workers. Instead, it has changed the nature of many tasks.

Routine execution is increasingly supported or automated. Human input is concentrated on oversight, decision making, interpretation, and responsibility. Employees are expected to work with systems that suggest, generate, or predict outcomes, while remaining accountable for final decisions.

The learning function itself is under pressure. Gartner (2024) reports that 85 percent of learning and development leaders agree there will be a surge in skills development needs due to AI and digital trends over the next three years, and 93 percent agree it is leaders' responsibility to ensure the workforce has time and resources for continuous learning.

In this environment, competence is no longer defined by knowing how to do everything manually. It is defined by knowing when to trust technology, when to question it, and when to intervene.

LEARNING SPEED AND RETENTION ARE CLOSELY LINKED

Hiring for learning speed is not only about recruitment. It is also about retention. Employers are acutely aware that people who grow are more likely to stay, while people who stagnate leave.

LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report (2025) captures this pressure from inside organisations: 49 percent of learning and talent development professionals say their executives are concerned employees do not have the right skills to execute business strategy. When strategy changes faster than skills, organisations either build learning capacity or face constant churn.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING BY 2026



For schools, vocational education, and training providers, this shift presents a clear challenge. Employers are no longer judging programmes only on content coverage. They are judging outcomes in practice.

Graduates are valued when they can:

- approach unfamiliar tasks with confidence
- explain how they learn, not just what they learned
- work with incomplete information
- communicate decisions clearly
- improve through feedback

This places greater emphasis on learning environments that mirror real work conditions. Scenario based learning, problem solving tasks, iterative projects, and reflective assessment methods align more closely with what employers now expect.
Teaching remains essential. But teaching must be accompanied by opportunities to practise adaptation.

KNOWLEDGE DEPTH STILL MATTERS, BUT IT MUST EVOLVE

None of this suggests that expertise is no longer important. In many sectors, deep knowledge is essential for safety, quality, and compliance. What has changed is the expectation that expertise remains static.

By 2026, expertise is valuable only if it can update itself. The most successful professionals are those who treat learning as part of the job, not something that ends with certification.





A FINAL MESSAGE FROM THE INDUSTRY

Employers are not looking for finished products. They are looking for people who can keep becoming something new.
In a labour market defined by constant change, learning speed has become the most reliable indicator of future performance. Knowledge opens the door. The ability to keep learning is what allows people to stay inside.
For readers of this newsletter, the implication is clear. Preparing people for work in 2026 means preparing them for transition, not stability. Those who can learn quickly will not only remain employable. They will shape the roles that come next.



The "Job for Life" is dead

The End of the “One Profession” Era. Why Skills Matter More Than a Diploma

The World Has Changed Forever The concept of a “job for life” has finally disappeared. In the past, people chose a profession in their youth and worked in the same place for forty years. Tools and tasks remained virtually unchanged for decades. Today, such stability has become impossible.

Constant Change is the New Normal Technology is advancing at an incredible pace. What was relevant yesterday is outdated today. We live in an era of constant change. No diploma guarantees success forever. The only way out is to keep moving forward.

A Dynamic Profile Instead of a Static Title Forget the old term “profession.” Today, the “professional profile” comes first. It is a set of your unique skills and abilities. It is like a construction set that you assemble yourself. You can change the details of this construction set at any time.

Employers no longer look only at the name on your diploma. What matters to them is what you can do with your hands and how quickly you solve problems. Your profile must be flexible and dynamic. This is the only way to remain a valuable employee.

Evolution: The Car Example Take a look at an ordinary car mechanic from our school. Just yesterday, his work was mainly mechanical. He tightened nuts and replaced oil. He worked with iron and simple tools. Today, the car has turned into a computer on wheels.

Modern transport is filled with complex electronics. Electric cars have changed the rules of the game in the market. Now the mechanic works with a tablet and a scanner. He has to understand program code and electrical diagrams. The mechanic has become a diagnostic engineer.



The Main Skill: The Ability to Learn Changing equipment is only half the battle. The main change is in the approach to learning. We are introducing special “learn to learn” modules. This is the most important skill for a modern person. It allows you to navigate the world of information.

Students must be able to find answers on their own. They do not wait for ready-made solutions from the teacher. They open technical documentation and look for the cause. They learn to analyze complex diagrams independently. This makes them free from external circumstances.

We Do Not Prepare Students for Their First Job Our goal is not just to find employment for our graduates. We want to give them a start to a long career. Their first job may be a simple assistant position. But our students are ready for much more. They have the foundation for continuous professional growth.



Over the years, technology will change again. New types of engines or transport will appear. Our graduates will not be afraid of these innovations. They will simply open a new manual and study it. They will add a new detail to their “profile.”

The Path to Leadership Our students' ambitions are not limited to repairs. We provide knowledge for process management. Today you are a successful electric vehicle diagnostician. Tomorrow you will become a senior shift supervisor. In five years, you will be managing your own service center.

You understand how the entire business system works. You know how to teach others and organize work. We are laying the foundation for these leadership skills right now. Education at our school is the foundation for success. It will serve you throughout your life.

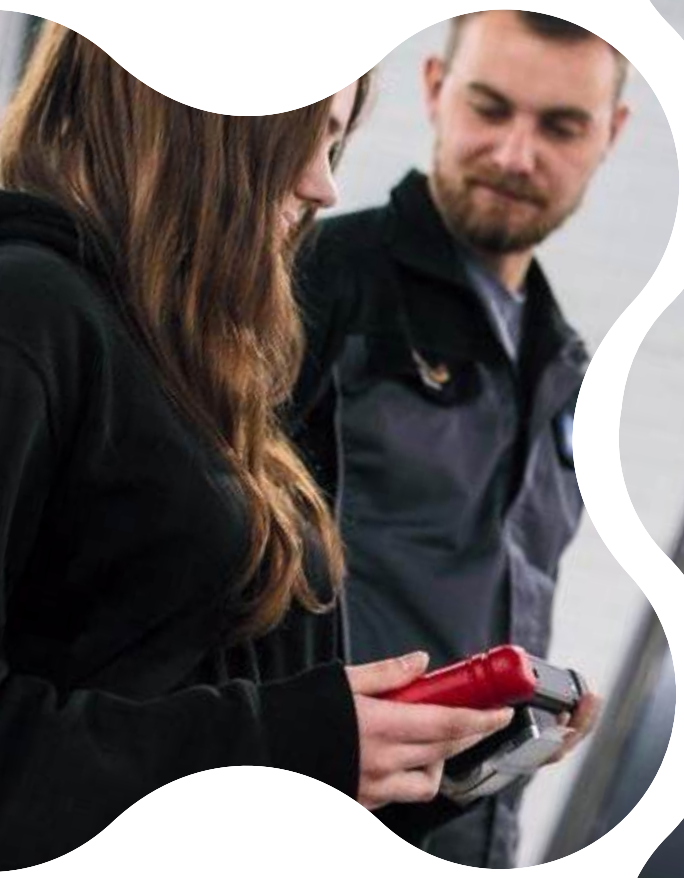
The Ultimate Goal Remember our main rule and motto. It explains the essence of our work:

Did you know...

...Cyprus now recognises a “Master Technician”?

At EQF levels 5–6, Master Technicians work with full autonomy to diagnose complex systems and train other staff.

> **WE ARE NOT TRAINING YOU FOR YOUR FIRST JOB. WE ARE TRAINING YOU FOR YOUR LAST ONE."**







Did you know ...

"maintenance fitter" is a top-10 profession in Ukraine?

It currently ranks 8th among the most in-demand jobs, representing 1.7% of all vacancies nationwide.

Bridging the Gap: How the New Job Profiles Will Change My Classroom

Job profile – a common framework for dialogue between employers and VET providers

The project EQAVET 4.0's main objective is to connect VET supply with labour market demands, which should focus on communication between the labour market and VET providers. This means to accommodate the dialogue on the competencies required tasks in a specific occupation by companies to VET schools:

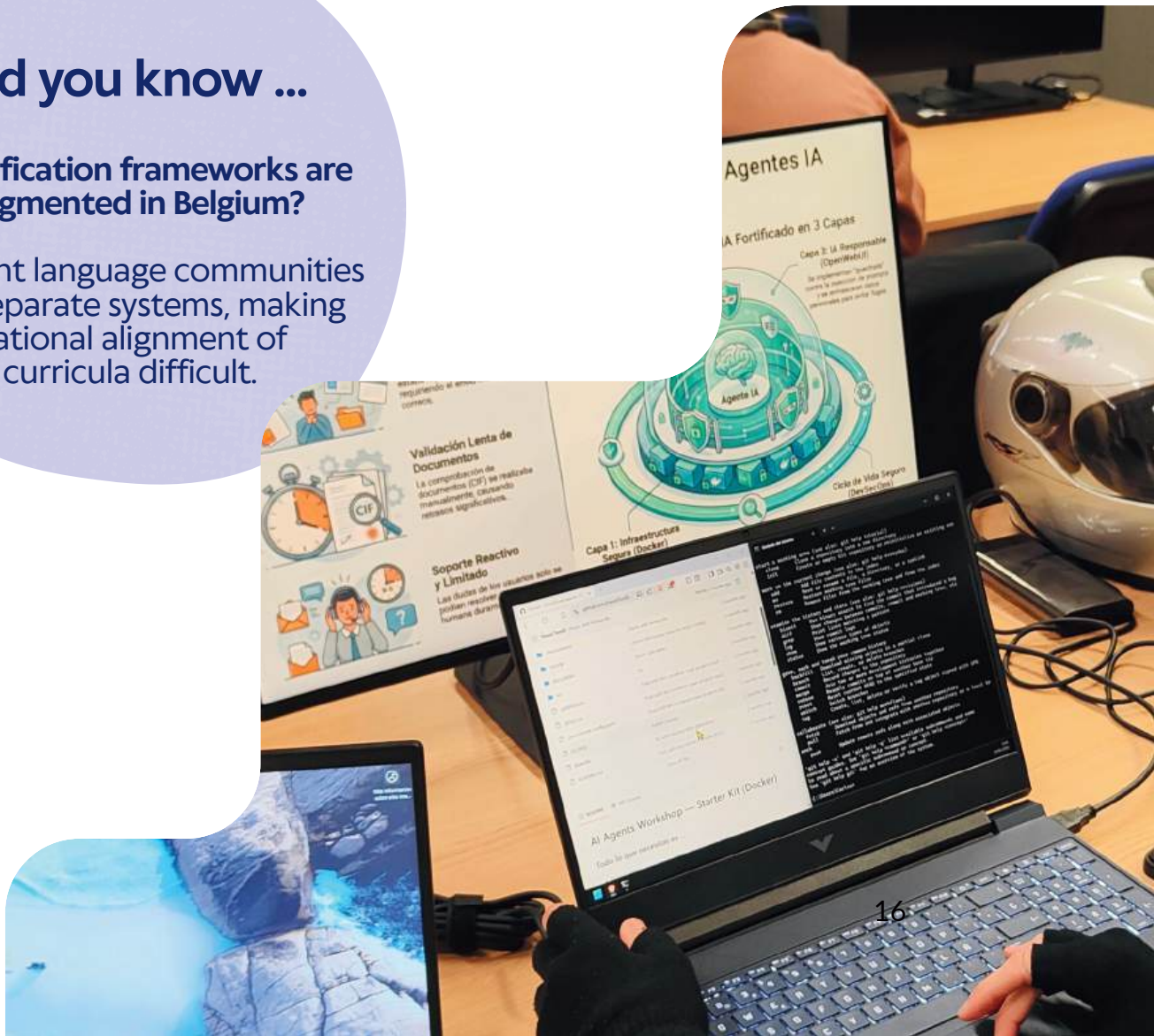
- a standardised approach
- a common frame of reference
- a mutual language

The intended National research in WP 2 thus acquired the character of an experiment, a pilot with this type of occupational mapping as a method for establishing (gaps in) VET relevance for the labour market and supporting the dialogue on increasing that relevance.

Did you know ...

...qualification frameworks are fragmented in Belgium?

Different language communities use separate systems, making national alignment of curricula difficult.



Job skills are an ongoing challenge

The approach to be applied in the EQAVET 4.0 project is based on its partners' presumption that there will always be some distance between labour demands and VET supply, in terms of both quantity and quality. The challenging assignment for stakeholders on both sides is to be aware of this friction and keep the inescapable gaps as narrow as possible. The project started with national investigations among stakeholders in the participating countries to explore and raise awareness of the challenges posed by the EQAVET indicators. How to address these challenges? This yields various priorities for establishing a better, more sustainable match between VET supply and evolving labour demands. The project chose to focus on a stronger collaboration of stakeholders, supported by a structural approach, a common frame of reference as well as a common vocabulary.

At the sector level

- Be as clear, specific, honest and up to date as possible on labour demands, job requirements and career perspectives.
- Create a network of companies committed to professional education to discuss educational issues and represent the sector.
- Take initiative in setting the standards for craftsmanship and the dialogue with VET providers on qualifications, curricula and learning materials.

At the regional level of VET providers and companies

- Make active use of job profiles as applied in the EQAVET project to support work placements and companies' assessments and evaluations.
- Make sure end-term documents and curricula relate to and correspond with tasks to be performed, work results to be achieved and abilities to possess.
- Pay attention to innovation as a separate subject in curricula, (work placement) assignments and learning materials (independent of qualifications yet to be adjusted to new regulations, technologies, etc.).

Did you know ...

Sweden has no formal tools to analyse skills needs?

Despite its high-tech sectors, VET providers often rely on informal networking and phone calls to identify employer demands.

Job profile framework

EQAVET 4.0 intend to develop a systematic approach to the elaboration of a job profile as a common framework for dialogue between the employer and the VET provider.
The job profile outlines an employee's job duties. This useful tool offers a good explanation of the components of a job and what the company is specifically seeking when it has open vacancies. Companies can use it for recruiting, posting jobs, and providing clear parameters for job seekers. For employees, it is an easy-to-use method for identifying key components of their jobs.

From the perspective of VET schools, there is a need for clear and well-defined standards that specify job requirements. Vocational education is judged by the extent to which is achieves a good performance for trainees and graduates in the labour market. It is, therefore, primarily up to the sector to provide VET schools with well-specified occupational profiles as a touchstone for their programmes, especially for students' performance in work placements in the early stages of their professional lives. The job profile is best developed by a team of employers who understand the organisation's needs, as well as VET schools, who can draft profiles to discuss with the sector.



Job profiles contain an overview of:

- Job duties and responsibilities, with information regarding the work environment and the activities that employees will be exposed to on a daily basis
- Experience needed to do the job
- Qualifications and skills necessary to perform the job: technical and professional knowledge, capabilities and their expected levels of professional contents
- Education and credentials required
- The physical demands of the job and the surrounding work environment

In organisational roles, it is possible to identify two distinct and fundamental expectations: - Purpose expectations: the reason why a role exists in the organisation - Profile expectations: the characteristics (job profile) expressed in terms of competence (knowledge and capabilities) that the role must possess to achieve the expected performance results.



Job profile framework

An important element is, therefore, to have a common vocabulary and to apply it in a consistent (standardised) and efficient way for all jobs concerned. A common language between the worlds of education and employment creates a connection that enables VET providers to refer to it to describe the learning outcomes of their curricula and anticipate future skills needs, thereby better understanding labour market trends. Furthermore, a common vocabulary between people and jobs helps people in finding the job that best matches their skills.

The relevance of VET for labour in the EQAVET 6 perspective depends on the satisfaction of both employers and employees with the professional competence acquired through the VET programme. In other words, VET results should meet the job requirements defined by labour demand. However, as job profiles are developed and used by companies, they rarely articulate the (level of) knowledge, skills, and competences as useful targets for vocational qualifications and VET curricula. The Occupational Profiles needed to support the dialogue between and the collaboration of VET and labour have to:

- Bridge the communication gap between education and work
- Match (online) people to jobs
- Support mobility
- Enable education and training in the shift to learning outcomes
- Support skills, aptitude, and statistics



The Sectoral Atlas: A Tale of Eight Economies

From the hills of Abruzzo to the code-mines of Vilnius, Europe's vocational training systems are racing to catch a moving target. A special report on the geography of skills.



IF ONE WISHES to see the heartbeat of the Italian economy, one does not go to the fashion houses of Milan or the ruins of Rome. One goes to the Val di Sangro in Abruzzo. Here, in the "Automotive & Mechatronic Valley," a cluster of 140 companies generates a staggering €4.5bn in annual turnover—roughly half of the region's entire export capacity. In 2024, despite global headwinds, employment here grew by 1.1%, adding nearly 6,000 jobs. The factories are humming; the order books are full.

Yet, ask a foreman on the floor what keeps him awake at night, and he will not mention tariffs, taxes, or the price of steel. He will mention welders. Or rather, the lack of them.

This paradox—of economic engines revving while the fuel line of talent runs dry—is the central finding of the EQAVET 4.0 "National Sectoral Mapping." By analyzing the economic weight and occupational shifts across eight European countries, the project has drawn a map of a continent in transition. It reveals a landscape where the "skills gap" is no longer a cliché, but a quantifiable drag on GDP. The findings paint a picture of a Vocational Education and Training (VET) system that is motivated but structurally outpaced by the reality on the ground.

The Heavyweights: Sun, Steel, and Strategy

The sheer scale of the sectors analyzed suggests that VET is no longer a peripheral concern for education ministries; it is a matter of national economic security. In many regions, specific industries are not just employers; they are the gravity holding the local economy together.

Consider Greece. The mapping report confirms that tourism is not merely an industry; it is the atmosphere the country breathes. Direct revenues hit €30.2 bn in 2024, with 40.7 m international arrivals—a 5% surge. One in five Greek jobs depends on hospitality. However, the report highlights a critical friction. While the demand for labor is insatiable, the requirements have shifted. The industry no longer needs generic kitchen hands; it needs highly specific hierarchies of competence, from Chef de Partie (EQF 3-4) to Sous Chef (EQF 4-5). When local providers in Thessaly struggle to train these specific profiles with the requisite leadership skills, it is not an educational failure; it is a strategic vulnerability for an economy where €27.8m was just committed to regional promotion.

A similar metamorphosis is visible in Ukraine. Despite the ongoing war, the automotive sector remains a lifeline, with GDP inching up 3.5% in late 2024. But the demand has shifted dramatically. The humble, grease-stained mechanic of the 20th century is dying. In his place, the market demands "Diagnostic Specialists" (EQF 5) capable of servicing electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrid systems.

The mapping identifies "maintenance fitters" as the 8th most in-demand profession, but the curriculum often remains stuck in the combustion age, creating a dangerous lag between the skills taught and the technology driving on the roads.

Region	Sector	Value	Trend
Italy (Abruzzo)	Auto/Mechatronics Turnover	€4.5 bn	↗ (+1.1% jobs)
Greece (National)	Tourism Revenue	€30.2 bn	↗ (+5% arrivals)
Sweden (National)	Life Sciences R&D	3.57% of GDP	➡ (Steady High)
Lithuania (National)	ICT Workforce	61,900 workers	↗ (2.6x in 10 yrs)

FIGURE 1: THE ECONOMIC ENGINE Selected Sectoral Contributions (2024-2025 Data)



Did you know ...

...that the Automotive & Mechatronic Valley generates billions?

In Italy's Abruzzo region, the mechatronics sector alone produces around €4.5 billion in annual turnover.



Photo by Yuriy Malenko

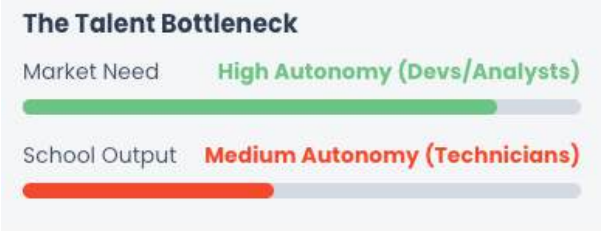

REHAU
GEBERIT

The Silicon Steppes

If the machinery is lacking in Abruzzo, the software is lagging in Vilnius. Nowhere is the disconnect between classroom and boardroom more acute than in the digital sphere, where the rate of change is measured in months, not years.

In Lithuania, the Information and Communication sector has become a juggernaut, generating nearly 26% of total e-commerce turnover. The workforce data is startling: in just ten years, the number of ICT specialists has swelled by a factor of 2.6, from 23,500 to almost 62,000. However, the "mapping" reveals a bottleneck. While VET providers churn out "Network Technicians" (Medium autonomy), the market is screaming for "Data Analysts" and "Senior Developers" (High autonomy).

The report notes a systemic sluggishness: formal curriculum changes in Lithuania can take up to three years. In the tech world, three years is an epoch. A parallel story unfolds in Spain. In Málaga TechPark—home to 600 companies and a pivot point for the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (ENIA)—the demand is for esoteric roles like MLOps (Machine Learning Operations). The mapping identifies a specific need for professionals who can manage the full "AI project lifecycle." Yet, Spanish providers report that updating a national curriculum to include "cloud AI" is often stalled by bureaucratic inertia, leaving graduates with knowledge that was cutting-edge when they enrolled, but obsolete by the time they graduate.



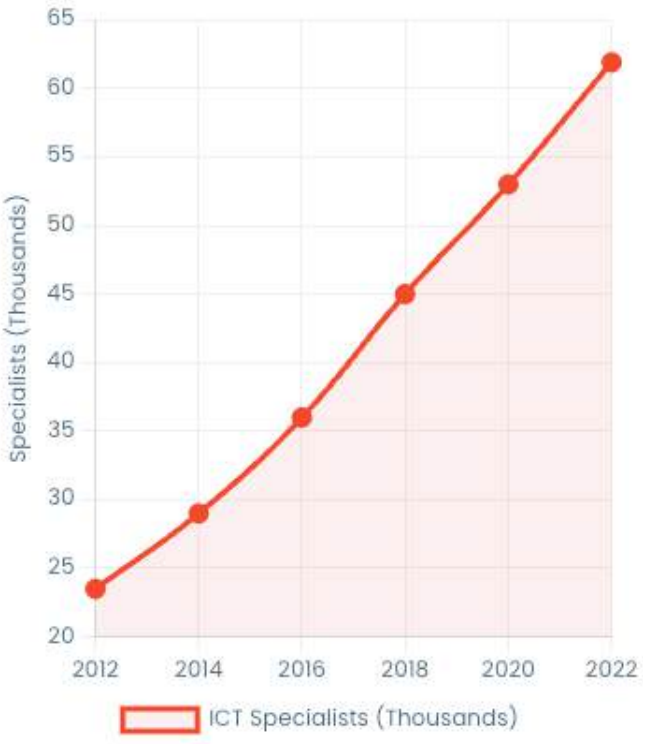


FIGURE 2: Workforse explosion vs Agile Response. data adapted from National Sectoral Mapping Report as part of deliverable 2.1 of EQAVET 4.0

In Lithuania, the ICT sector has exploded, generating 26% of all e-commerce turnover. The workforce has more than doubled in a decade.

However, education lags behind. VET providers are training Network Technicians, but the market demands Data Analysts. Curriculum updates can take 3 years—an eternity in tech

THE SOFT SKILLS PARADOX

Perhaps the most counter-intuitive finding of the mapping is that "technical" sectors are not actually asking for more technical skills. They are asking for human ones.

In the high-pressure environment of Belgian healthcare—a sector employing 670,000 and facing a severe demographic crisis—technical competence is assumed. A nurse knows how to draw blood. The missing variables, according to employers, are "resilience," "empathy," and "stress management." The mapping clearly distinguishes between the technical tasks of a Geriatric Care Assistant (EQF 3-4) and the emotional fortitude required to perform them.

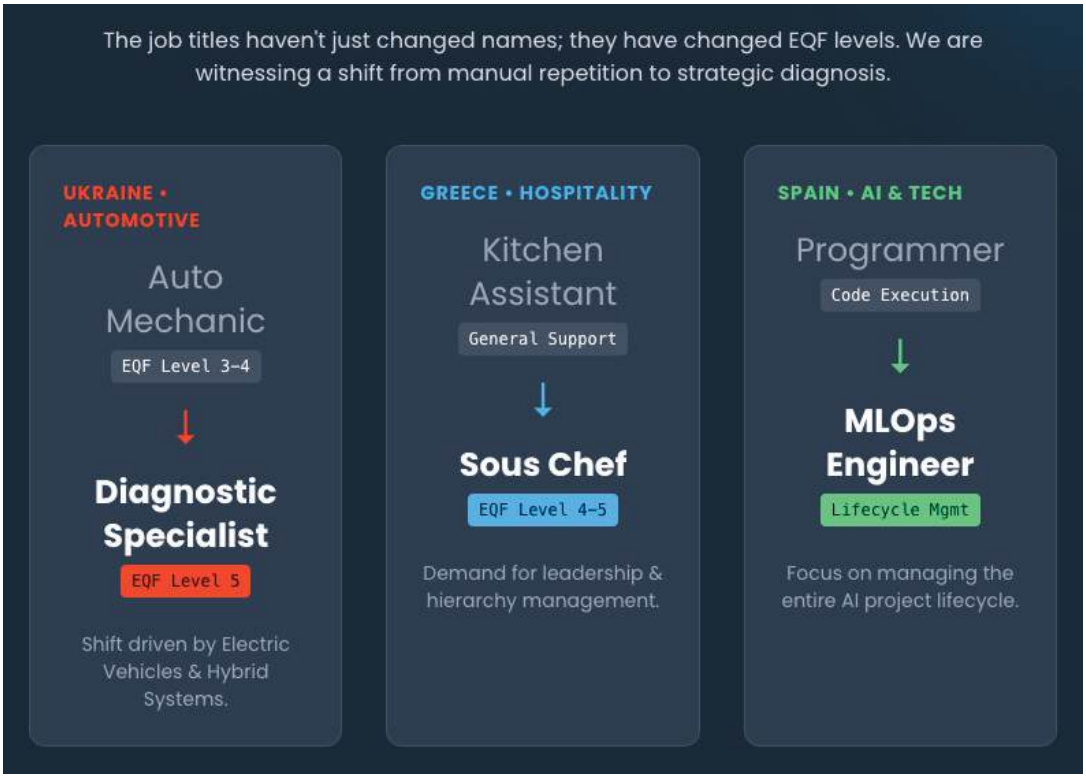
Similarly, in the Italian automotive workshops, the ability to operate a CNC machine (EQF 3) is useless without "reliability" and "safety awareness." This is the "Soft Skills Paradox": as machines take over the repetitive tasks (from turning screws to writing code), the remaining human tasks become intensely social and behavioral. Yet, most VET curricula are still designed to measure the former—because it is easy to test if a weld is straight—rather than the latter, which is harder to quantify but essential for employability.

THE INNOVATION GAP

Finally, the report uncovers a troubling irony in European innovation: the wealthier the sector, the poorer the school.

Sweden is a global leader in Life Sciences, investing a massive 3.57% of its GDP in R&D. The government allocated an extra SEK 650m in 2024 to keep this edge. One would expect Swedish VET schools to be laboratories of the future. Instead, the report notes that providers often lack the capital to buy the advanced equipment required to teach modern biotech. They are forced to "borrow" equipment from companies. It is a functional workaround, but a symbolic failure: the public sector is attempting to teach 21st-century skills on 20th-century budgets.

This resource gap is mirrored in Cyprus, though in a different form. There, the deficit is not just hardware, but data. The report highlights the absence of a standard Occupational Competence Needs Analysis (OCNA) process. Without the tools to measure what is missing, the system flies blind.



The Verdict

The Sectoral Mapping of 2025 sends a clear signal. The economy has moved on. It has moved to Val di Sangro's automated lines, to Málaga's AI hubs, and to the EV repair shops of Kyiv. The job profiles have shifted up the EQF ladder, from manual repetition to strategic diagnosis.

The educational systems, hamstrung by centralization (as seen in Greece and Lithuania) and resource deficits (Sweden), are following, but at a distance. Bridging this gap requires more than new textbooks; it requires the systematic "VET LOOP" that this project proposes—turning the informal handshake between a headmaster and a factory owner into a stream of hard data. Until then, Europe's engines will continue to rev, but the gears will grind.





Did you know ...

...tourism supports one in five jobs in Greece?

The sector generates €30.2 billion in direct revenue and employs approximately 800,000 people.

From Teaching Tools to Solving Real Problems

How Experiential and Challenge-Based Learning Strengthens Quality in VET at SMK

A practical EQAVET-aligned example from the Multimedia Technician programme

Why vocational education needs to change

For many years, vocational education and training (VET) has been organised around subjects and tools: separate modules, predefined content, and a strong focus on theoretical knowledge. However, today's labour market requires much more. Employers expect graduates who can understand real situations, work through complete processes, collaborate with others, and deliver solutions.
In line with EQAVET priorities, SMK College of Applied Sciences is responding to this shift by organising learning around experiential and challenge-based approaches, moving from subject-based teaching to task-based learning.

From teaching the tool to teaching the task

At SMK, experiential learning starts with a simple question: What does a professional actually have to do in real work situations?

Instead of teaching tools or theoretical topics in isolation, teachers design learning around authentic professional tasks. Learners are challenged to solve real problems, and only then are tools, methods, and theory introduced – at the time when they become necessary.

This shift is clearly visible in teachers' planning practices.

> **"THE SYLLABUS OF THE FUTURE ISN'T A LIST OF TEXTBOOKS; IT'S A LIST OF PROBLEMS TO SOLVE"**

The visual example shows how SMK teachers map an entire learning journey for the "Basics of Marketing" module. Rather than planning individual lessons, teachers visualise:

- real marketing tasks and challenges,
- required competences and learning outcomes,
- reflection and feedback moments,
- links between theory and practice.

This type of planning ensures that learning remains coherent, relevant, and outcome oriented. The core idea of the Experiential Learning Methodology applied at SMK since 2019 is that learners do not simply "receive" knowledge, but actively construct it themselves through action, experimentation, making mistakes, analysing their expeiences, and linking them to theory.

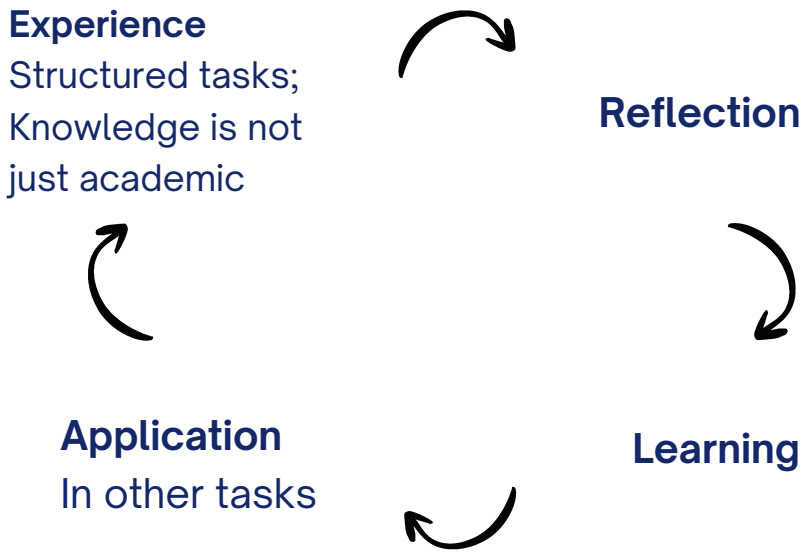


FIGURE 3 A visual planning process illustrating experiential learning

Experiential learning at programme level

Experiential learning at SMK is not limited to individual modules or isolated projects. It is implemented at programme level, ensuring consistency and quality across the entire learning process.

Teachers work collaboratively to design learning as a continuous cycle of experience, reflection, learning, and application. This shared approach supports coherence between modules and helps learners gradually build professional competence.

The visual planning process illustrated in the image supports this work by helping teachers:

- align tasks with qualification requirements
- gradually increase task complexity
- integrate reflection as a regular part of learning
- maintain a clear link between learning outcomes and assessment

In this way, experiential learning becomes a structured and quality-assured process, rather than an improvised teaching method. Learning is organised around meaningful tasks and focused on the learner's development, not on the simple reproduction of knowledge.

At the core of the Experiential Learning Methodology are several interconnected principles. Learning begins with practice, through real or realistic professional tasks. Reflection is embedded throughout the process, encouraging learners to analyse what works, what is challenging, and why. Theory is introduced when it becomes necessary, giving it clear purpose and relevance. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding learning through questions and feedback while leaving responsibility for decisions to learners. Learning remains cyclical, with experience continuously analysed and applied in increasingly complex situations.

At SMK, this methodology is applied across vocational education and training programmes focused on high value-added competences, particularly digital skills required by the contemporary labour market. Strong emphasis is placed on project-based learning, teamwork, real-life problem analysis, and practical solution development. Digital technologies and specialised software become a natural part of learning, while theory is acquired through its application in practice.

How an audiovisual product is created at SMK

Real challenge and problem definition:
Learning starts with a real need from a business or social partner. Learners analyse the target audience, communication goals, and the problem the audiovisual product must solve.

Idea generation and creative exploration:
Learners work in teams to generate ideas, explore formats, and test storytelling approaches. Decisions are discussed and justified, encouraging critical thinking.

Concept and script development:
Ideas are structured into a clear concept and script. Theory is introduced as a prac-



A practical example: Multimedia Technician programme

tical support tool, helping lear-ners strengthen their solutions.

Team-based planning and pre-paration:
Learners distribute roles, plan resources, and set deadlines, developing both professional and transversal competences.

Production and post-production:
Filming, sound recording, editing, and visual effects are carried out using professional tools in real conditions.

Reflection, feedback, and improvement:
The product is presented to social partners, feedback is analysed, and improvements are made. Reflection turns experience into learning.

Transfer to new challenges:
Learners apply what they have learned to new and more complex tasks, com-pleting the experiential lear-ning cycle.

Value for all stakeholders through quality strategy

This approach creates clear and long-term value for all stakeholders, fully aligned with EQAVET principles.

Learners gain practical, labour market-relevant competences and confidence in solving real problems. Teachers streng-then their role as facilitators and designers of meaningful learning experiences, as illustrated by the visual planning example.

In the meantime, social par-tners engage with learners through real tasks and provide valuable feedback. Institutions ensure continuous quality im-

mprovement through transparent, outcome oriented programme design.

At SMK College of Applied Sciences, experiential learning is not only a teaching method but a strategic approach to quality in vocational education.
By designing learning around real tasks, supported by structured teacher planning and continuous reflection, SMK ensures that vocational education remains relevant, effective, and aligned with EQAVET objectives.



Did you know ...

...schools use informal micro-modules to keep skills current?
In Lithuania, VET providers often rely on short employer-led workshops to teach fast changing skills like cloud computing.



Industry perspective: Employers' needs and skills gaps in VET in the Tourism sector

The tourism sector constitutes a fundamental pillar of the Greek economy, making a decisive contribution to employment, regional development, and the country's international competitiveness. In an environment characterized by increasing demands for service quality, operational efficiency, and sustainability, tourism enterprises establish clear, market-driven requirements for their human resources. Despite the sector's strong growth dynamics and the steady demand for labor, aligning the skills of vocational education and training (VET) graduates with the actual needs of the labor market remains a significant challenge.



Did you know....

...head chefs are now EQF 5–6 professionals?

The Chef de Cuisine role requires leadership, budgeting, and strategic responsibility, not just cooking skills.

Feedback provided by employers in the hospitality and food service sectors indicates that, from a labor market perspective, existing VET programs deliver an adequate level of basic technical training. Graduates demonstrate knowledge of hygiene and safety standards, basic kitchen operations, front office procedures, reservations, and customer service. However, technical competence alone is insufficient to effectively meet the complex demands of the contemporary tourism environment, which is characterized by high work intensity, seasonality, and the need for immediate handling of operational challenges.

Employers highlight a limited ability among graduates to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, suggesting that training remains largely focused on the execution of predefined tasks. The insufficient emphasis on developing professional judgment, autonomy, and adaptability hampers the smooth transition from education to employment and negatively affects the job performance of young workers.





From the employers' perspective, particular concern is raised regarding deficiencies in transversal (soft) skills. Although competencies such as communication, teamwork, responsibility, and problem-solving are included in curriculum, their development and assessment are not carried out systematically. In practice, difficulties are observed in collaboration within multicultural teams, coping with work-related pressure, and handling customer complaints, with a direct impact on service quality.

According to employers in the tourism sector, additional issues emerge in relation to the quality of work-based learning. Although internships and apprenticeships are institutionally provided for, their implementation varies in terms of structure and supervision. Many trainees enter the labor market without a sufficient understanding of professional roles and workflow pro-cesses, which limits the educational value of practical training.

The tourism industry also reports significant gaps in digital skills and sustainability related competencies. The increasing use of management systems, digital booking tools, and cost control software renders digital competence a key employability prerequisite, nevertheless, many graduates possess limited practical familiarity with such tools. At the same time, the fragmented integration of sustainability and green transition topics results in a mismatch between theoretical training and operational practice.

At the institutional level, as emphasized by employers, there is a lack of systematic mechanisms for graduate tracking and feedback collection. The limited institutional linkage between education and the labor market hinders the timely and evidence-based revision of curricula.

Overall, from the perspective of the tourism industry, the labor market requires professional profiles that combine technical competence with well-developed transversal, digital, and sustainability skills, as well as the ability to adapt to a rapidly evolving environment. The identified gaps are not attributed to the intrinsic quality of education itself, but rather to structural constraints within the VET system and the limited flexibility of curricula. Addressing these challenges presupposes the strengthening of work-based learning, continuous skills upgrading, and the development of institutionalized feedback mechanisms, in alignment with the quality principles of EQAVET.

The EQAVET4.0 family

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Sustainability InnoCenter

EVBB EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF INSTITUTES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING

BGT CONSULTING GROUP BUSINESS.GOVERNMENT.TECHNOLOGY

RINOVA innovar, crear & regenerar

SMK

MENTOR CENTER FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

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EQAVET 4.0

for quality in outcome-oriented VET

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