



# PROJECT WEEK REPORT

1st project week | 21 – 25 January 2019 (Apeldoorn,  
NL)

## ABSTRACT

The human factor very easily creates inequality during the examination process resulting in frustration and non-representative results. Aventus developed a methodology to minimise the human factor and increase quality and satisfaction of all stakeholders.

## QUALITY CATEGORY

- Guidance
- Learning
- Examination

## QMS4VET Consortium

The partners within the QMS4VET project are:

- Aventus ([www.ventus.nl](http://www.ventus.nl))
- ATEC ([www.atec.pt](http://www.atec.pt))
- BBS Syke EUROPASCHULE ([www.bbs-syke.de](http://www.bbs-syke.de))
- bit Schulungscener ([www.bit.at](http://www.bit.at))
- West Lothian College ([www.west-lothian.ac.uk](http://www.west-lothian.ac.uk))
- Kainuun ammattiopisto ([www.kao.fi](http://www.kao.fi))

## INTRODUCTION

Aventus is the Dutch VET organisation with locations in Apeldoorn, Deventer and Zutphen. They offer VET courses and education for all relevant professions from EQF level 1 to 4. Aventus organises their examination process with focus on fair outcomes representing the required knowledge, skills and competences relevant for each profession.

During the first QMS4VET project week Aventus presented their quality management system followed by their case study (see Annex 1 for the agenda). All participants discussed the presented methodology based on ECVET standards, resulting in a detailed SWOT analysis and step-by-step recommendation for implementation. In order to make allowance for the differing degrees of flexibility within national educational frameworks the recommendations focus on aspects that are useful for any interested organisation.

For more information about the QMS4VET project and other project week reports see <https://www.ventus.nl/qms4vet>

## OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were set for best practice with respect to the Aventus examination approach.

Ensure:

1. that the examination takes place in the context of realistic working conditions;
2. independent and competent judgement during the examination;
3. equal conditions for each candidate during their examinations;
4. that examination is separated from the educational programme.

## METHODOLOGY

The goal of the Aventus examination methodology is to let the candidate prove that he/she masters the knowledge, skills and competences as described in the applicable qualification specification and in line with the ECVET approach. In order to ensure this, the following objectives have to be met:

- A. Ensure that the examination takes place in the context of realistic working conditions**  
In the context of the Aventus approach this will ideally take place in real working conditions during internship or apprenticeship. This means that during examination an independent and qualified assessor visits the workplace, using the official examination documents which are based on the ECVET standards (knowledge, skills and competences).
- B. Ensure independent and competent judgement during the examination**  
The assessor and candidate should not have a direct teaching or personal relationship with each other.
- C. Ensure equal conditions for each candidate during their examinations**  
Equality of preparation, implementation (including duration and place) and evaluation of the examination should be available for all candidates and assessors.
- D. Ensure that examination is separated from the educational programme**  
The examination will take place when the individual learning process has been completed and after a clear decision to proceed has been taken by the relevant stakeholders.

For further information: Annex 2 (Aventus presentations).

## SWOT ANALYSIS

The following analyses the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the Aventus case study.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The possibilities of using a digital programme in preparation suits the individual needs of the candidates</li> <li>• The candidate can take the exam when they are ready i.e. flexible time for exams when it is outsourced to an external company</li> <li>• Equal conditions for each candidate</li> <li>• The four-eyes principle is adopted (plus recording)</li> <li>• There is a strong quality circle</li> <li>• Structure of exams is nationally consistent</li> <li>• There is a thorough check of candidate's required skills and competencies</li> <li>• All exam conditions create 'real' workplace conditions</li> <li>• Commission of Examinations Board provides multiple levels of approval for the whole course and candidates know who to approach to challenge</li> <li>• Assessors have to be certified</li> <li>• Teachers are unable to assess their own candidates</li> <li>• Strong relationships with companies; this ensures companies feel valued too.</li> <li>• Process is very well documented – fully transparent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a significant amount of resources and paper work</li> <li>• Creates pressure due to there being a requirement for a separate exam. Failing the exam means failing the diploma</li> <li>• High failure rate – are all markers following the guidance consistently?</li> <li>• There is a lack of trust from Government which can result in too many checks</li> <li>• Limited individual adjustments for special/additional needs</li> <li>• Timing of in-house exams is not flexible to the individual candidate</li> <li>• Often the assessor is also the teacher, which should not be the case.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even more opportunities to have better relationships with other companies</li> <li>• Use fewer simulations and more 'real practice' examinations</li> <li>• Make the internal exams more flexible (time flexibility to the individual)</li> <li>• Use digitalisation and other new technologies (augmented reality) to make the system less bureaucratic.</li> <li>• Consider if 2 teachers are always necessary at every examination</li> <li>• Clear communication about how often candidates can take part in examinations</li> <li>• Buying exams takes a lot of work off the shoulders of teachers – no preparation or marking</li> <li>• More cooperation between schools i.e. using foundations</li> <li>• Create Dutch/European Stamp of Quality for other countries to recognise high quality of candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of objectivity</li> <li>• Separate from the educational programme – organisational difficulties, bigger exams (big groups), does not always meet the needs of the candidates</li> <li>• Same standards on all levels/all sectors/all education (in such a big organisation)</li> <li>• Differences in thinking about quality in educational teams and quality management</li> <li>• Profit orientation of companies that sell exams could lead to inequalities</li> <li>• Relationship with Government causes anxiety and mistrust</li> <li>• Dependency on partner exam organisation (external) i.e. fire, bankruptcy</li> <li>• Requires disciplined attitude of staff</li> </ul>

## Reflection and awareness on possible weaknesses and threats

In the preceding SWOT analysis an overview was given of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the Aventus examination system. In the following section, the strengths and opportunities are integrated in a Step-By-Step Implementation plan which can be used in implementing all or parts of the system. However, in doing so, it is important to be aware of the weaknesses and threats Aventus is facing in the used examination system. Therefore, in the following paragraph a reflection can be found on the main and most important potential weaknesses and threats based on the results of the SWOT-analysis. This reflection serves to balance the potential strengths and weaknesses and should be taken into account when implementing all or part of the Aventus examination system.

1. The high quantity of resources required: it is recommended that users should be aware of the amount of resources (for example, budget, staff and/or time) necessary for successful implementation of this methodology
2. The timing of in-house exams: due to organisational difficulties, it appears that exams cannot always be carried out flexibly throughout the year for each individual candidate. As a result, some exams are carried out in a group. This might increase pressure for candidates since they cannot follow the timing of their own individual learning process which therefore increase their chance of failing an exam
3. Assessment of exams: this is always subjective and therefore there is always a risk of the human factor influencing the results of the exam
4. Limited individual adjustments available for candidates with special/additional needs during examination: ensure beforehand that the candidate has the ability to meet the occupational requirements
5. The quality of examination in educational teams: to ensure the implementation of the examination takes place as intended, a strong quality culture has to be present or developed in the educational teams
6. Conflicting interests: the main priority of a profit oriented company may be to perform the examination against low costs, for example, whereas the main interest of the educational/training organisation is to perform a high quality examination. To overcome this threat a recommendation is to visit the examination company regularly and carry out quality checks of the examination process.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR STEP BY STEP IMPLEMENTATION

The following recommendations can be used when implementation of parts of the Aventus examination system is considered.

### Context of a realistic working condition:

- Educational/training organisations should develop a strong network of external partners;
- Exams should be developed in collaboration with external partners;
- Exams should, if possible, be carried out in a real working environment, or simulated in collaboration with external partners;
- The exam environment and materials used, including equipment, tools and documentation, should be as close as possible to a realistic working environment;
- Where role play is used to carry out a simulated exam, actors involved in the role play should have experience in the area of work relevant to the exam;
- The duration of the exam should reflect the actual duration of the real working tasks which are being tested in the exam.

#### **Independent and competent judgement:**

- Exam assessors should be appropriately qualified to assess according to the standards set by the educational/training organisation;
- Exam assessors should be subject experts in the area relevant to the exam;
- To maintain the integrity of the exam teachers and/or colleagues who have recently or directly taught/worked with the learner should not also assess the learner;
- To ensure consistency of assessment, all learners undertaking the exam should have prior access to the criteria document and be issued with the same exam material;
- If possible, the independence of the assessment should be ensured by using two assessors (four-eyes principle). Otherwise, independence should be ensured using other methods (e.g. recording an oral exam).

#### **Equal conditions for each candidate/learner:**

- Information and preparation materials regarding exam conditions and requirements should be freely available to all learners in a number of different formats to allow equal opportunity in preparing for the exam and in order to meet the learners' individual learning needs;
- All external assessors who are briefing learners on exam conditions and requirements should be issued with accurate step by step instructions to ensure consistency and clarity;
- Where role play is used to carry out a simulated exam, all actors involved in the exam should receive the same briefing documentation and/or oral instructions to ensure consistency of interaction with learners;
- All external partners should be familiar with and utilise the same defined quality standards in carrying out exams to ensure consistency and equality for every learner.

#### **Separate from the educational programme:**

- Ensure that learners have completed all required aspects of their individual education programme before permitting them to take the exam;
- Ensure that learners have the opportunity to take exams flexibly throughout the academic year in order to take into account the individual education process and abilities of all learners.

## EVALUATION

After analysing the Aventus examination system the following conclusions can be drawn:

#### **Advantages:**

The examination is according to the ECVET approach (knowledge, skills and competences) with a strong focus on testing in real life situations/daily business. A high quality assessment is guaranteed since the assessors, are proven competent in judging assessments, work in teams and do not have any relationship with or connection to the candidate. Outsourcing of the examination makes the previous advantages achievable and works very cost and time efficient.

#### **Disadvantages:**

Although the presented examination system is very thorough, it is also bureaucratic because of the many documents involved which makes it (together with the requirements for independent assessment) labour intensive and therefore expensive.

#### **Tips for implementation:**

Because of the many requirements to guarantee a high quality examination many stakeholders are involved resulting in a long implementation period with step by step improvements.



## ANNEXES

1. Agenda 1<sup>st</sup> QMS4VET project week
2. Aventus presentations