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Quality Assurance within Dutch CoVEs

Experiences from Care About IT and T-shore from an EQAVET perspective

Colofon

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Abstract

This article analyses quality assurance within two Dutch Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) projects: Care About IT and T-shore. Based on document analysis and interviews with Dutch project coordinators and other stakeholders, it examines how quality assurance measures are shaped within these projects and to what extent align with relevant EQAVET indicators (stakeholder involvement and innovative learning and teaching methods).

The findings show that both projects make use of a combination of formal quality assurance structures and practice-oriented development processes. Collaboration with industry plays a central role in implementation, with stakeholders actively involved in curriculum development and educational delivery. Innovative learning and teaching methods are reflected in practice-based educational activities and the use of digital technologies such as virtual reality (VR).

The analysis also shows that quality assurance is actively applied in both projects, although often in a context-dependent and partly implicit way. Success factors are mainly related to active collaboration and continuity, while areas for improvement concern sustainability, impact measurement and the structural embedding of innovations in education.

Inhoud

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The National Reference Point EQAVET (NRP EQAVET) focuses on improving quality in Dutch Vocational Education and Training (VET). Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) play an important role in this ambition. A CoVE is an organisation that aims to strengthen vocational education through collaboration with industry, governments and other partners. Across Europe, increasing attention is being given to CoVEs as drivers of innovative and high-quality vocational education.
The NRP EQAVET is tasked with developing and sharing knowledge about quality assurance and quality culture in VET, including the role of data, collaboration and professional development. CoVEs are particularly interesting in this respect because they create structural links between education, industry, government and knowledge institutions, thereby developing new approaches to quality assurance and cooperation.

This report focuses on two Dutch CoVEs: **T-shore**, which aims to strengthen education for the offshore wind sector, and **Care About IT**, which focuses on future-proof healthcare and IT education.

By mapping their approaches to quality assurance, stakeholder involvement and educational innovation, the NRP EQAVET aims to provide insight into good practices that may be relevant for vocational education institutions more broadly.

1.2 Purpose of the report

This report describes the experiences of two Dutch CoVEs in applying quality assurance measures and instruments, specifically related to stakeholder involvement and innovative learning and teaching methods. The aim is to provide insight into how vocational education institutions collect and use information to improve educational quality. The resulting insights may help inspire other institutions in their own quality improvement efforts.

1.3 Methodology

This study combines document analysis (desk research) and semi-structured interviews. The aim is to develop a rich and reliable understanding of how the two Dutch CoVE projects, Care About IT and T-shore, apply quality assurance measures within both the European project structure and their own regional educational practice.

1.3.1 *Document analysis*

An extensive desk study was conducted using a range of project documents, including project proposals, progress reports, publicly available project information, project plans and previously published case studies. This document analysis forms the basis for understanding the intentions, structure and design of both CoVEs.

1.3.2 *Reflection on implementation practice (interviews)*

To gain insight into the actual implementation of quality assurance measures within the CoVE context, semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

- the Dutch CoVE coordinators;
- involved project partners from the field wherever possible.

These interviews provided deeper insight into implementation practices, perceived challenges and the ways in which quality assurance instruments are applied in day-to-day practice.

1.3.3 *Analysis using EQAVET indicators*

The analysis is structured around two EQAVET indicators that are relevant for Centres of Vocational Excellence:

1. **Stakeholder and social partner involvement**
2. **Innovative learning and teaching methods**

These two indicators from the analytical framework through which both the document analysis and interview data were interpreted.

1.3.4 *Analysis of strengths and areas for improvement*

By combining desk research and interview data, examples of good practice were identified, together with challenges and areas for improvement that may be relevant for the further professionalisation of CoVEs and their quality assurance processes. These insights are presented separately for each CoVE and compared in the concluding chapter.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the document analysis and interviews, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Which quality assurance measures and instruments are used within the two Dutch CoVE projects, and how do these relate to the relevant EQAVET indicators (stakeholder involvement and innovative learning environments)?

2. To what extent have these quality assurance measures been implemented within the CoVE projects, and what effect do they have on collaboration, educational quality and project outcomes?

3. What role do European partners play in shaping quality assurance within the CoVE context, including any external or prescribed quality assurance mechanisms, and how does this influence implementation within the Dutch projects?

4. How do Scalda and Noorderpoort apply their own quality assurance approaches and strategic policies within the international CoVE context, and to what extent does this align with their broader educational and internationalisation strategies?

5. What are the main success factors, challenges and areas for improvement in ensuring quality within CoVEs, based on the experiences of the Dutch coordinators?

2 Theoretical framework: EQAVET and CoVEs

2.1 The EQAVET cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act)

The NRP EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) promotes the development and safeguarding of educational quality within Dutch vocational education and training. At EU level, EQAVET serves as the European reference framework for quality assurance in VET. Quality assurance and improvement are approached through a cycle consisting of planning, implementation, evaluation and review, in line with the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle. EQAVET is intended as a source of inspiration rather than a replacement for national quality systems, supporting institutions in strengthening their quality culture.

2.2 Relevant EQAVET indicators for this study

The EQAVET framework[1] consists of descriptors and indicators that help institutions approach quality in a systematic way. Descriptors are linked to each stage of the quality cycle and support areas such as strategic planning, stakeholder cooperation, monitoring and continuous improvement. In addition, the framework includes a set of reference indicators related to labour market relevance, stakeholder involvement and innovation in learning environments.
For this report, two EQAVET indicators are particularly relevant because they closely align with the ambitions of CoVEs and form the basis for the analysis of Care About IT and T-shore. These indicators are discussed below.

2.2.1 Stakeholder and social partner involvement

EQAVET is based on the principle that quality assurance should not take place solely within educational institutions, but through close cooperation with all relevant partners. These include employers, government bodies, social partners, students and other stakeholders. The framework emphasises that a shared vision of quality, supported by all these parties, is a prerequisite for effective vocational education.
As CoVEs operate as regional skills ecosystems in which education and industry work closely together, active stakeholder involvement is an essential part of their quality approach. This indicator therefore helps assess how stakeholders are involved in the planning, implementation and improvement of educational activities and project outcomes.

2.2.2 Innovative learning and teaching methods

A second relevant EQAVET indicator focuses on the extent to which institutions develop innovative learning and teaching methods. The framework encourages educational organisations to invest in innovative approaches such as hybrid learning environments, digitalisation, authentic professional contexts and other forms of flexible learning. For

[1] EQAVET-brochure_Engelstalig.pdf

CoVEs, this is particularly relevant because they often serve as examples of educational innovation and experimentation within Europe.
Innovative learning environments are therefore not only a means of preparing students for future professional practice, but also an indicator of the quality and impact of a CoVE project.

3 T-shore

3.1 Context, objectives and focus

The CoVE project T-shore aims to strengthen vocational education and training in offshore wind energy across Europe by better aligning education with the rapidly growing demand for qualified professionals in this sector (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021; T-shore Project Consortium, n.d.). The project is carried out by a consortium of 13 partners from five countries (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway), bringing together vocational education institutions and companies in regional public-private partnerships (Katapult, 2024). The project was initiated in response to the energy transition, in which offshore wind plays an increasingly important role and requires a growing number of technically skilled workers. At the same time, there is a shortage of suitably trained professionals. In practice, it has also become clear that the skills developed within education do not always align with the needs of employers in the sector (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021; Katapult, 2024).

An additional challenge is that offshore wind education programmes differ from country to country, while the sector itself operates internationally and companies work with multinational teams. This makes it difficult to deploy workers flexibly across national borders and creates a need for greater alignment and cooperation within vocational education. From this perspective, harmonising educational programmes and competence profiles has become a key objective of the project.

T-shore seeks to address this challenge by establishing a European network of Centres of Vocational Excellence, in which educational institutions, companies and public authorities work together to develop future-oriented education. The project has the following objectives:

- identifying skills needs within the offshore wind sector (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021);
- developing harmonised educational content that addresses those needs (Katapult, 2024);
- strengthening public-private cooperation between education and industry;
- stimulating international cooperation among vocational education providers.

The project focuses on the development and implementation of harmonised education that responds to the needs of the offshore wind sector. In practice, this takes shape through:

- the development of ten harmonised learning modules for offshore wind technicians (T-shore Education, n.d.);
- the use of a shared competence profile that combines technical and generic skills;
- strengthening public-private cooperation within regional and international networks;

- developing practice-oriented and innovative learning environments, such as blended learning, simulations and VR (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021).

The target group consists of both students and professionals who wish to enter or retrain for the offshore wind sector (T-shore Education, n.d.).

3.2 Specific quality assurance measures

The T-shore project proposal includes a comprehensive quality assurance approach, built around a structured project organisation and clear agreements on monitoring and evaluation. Governance is organised through a project management team, work packages and a steering group, with regular reporting on both project progress and financial performance (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021; Interview T-shore, 2026).
Initially, the quality approach focuses on managing project processes and safeguarding the quality of the project's deliverables. This is achieved through dedicated work packages, regular meetings and formal reporting procedures, with partners sharing responsibility for project outcomes. Attention is also given to risk management and progress monitoring (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021).

Both the Impact Report and the interview indicate that this structure has been actively applied throughout the project (Katapult, 2024; Interview T-shore, 2026). According to project participants, the quality framework provides concrete guidance for implementation. In practice, quality assurance is not limited to project management but also focuses on the quality of educational products and collaboration among partners.

An important part of the quality assurance process is the evaluation of educational products at multiple levels. Learning modules are first reviewed within the international consortium and are subsequently tested in regional contexts together with companies and other stakeholders. Experiences and findings are then shared across the partnership and incorporated into further development cycles (Interview T-shore, 2026).
Several evaluation methods are used, including interviews, surveys and reflective sessions such as World Café workshops. These activities help partners identify what works well and where improvements are needed. In addition, peer reviews are conducted between different CoVEs, with partnerships evaluating one another using Katapult's phase model for public-private partnerships. These peer reviews address both the quality of collaboration and the development of the CoVEs themselves (Interview T-shore, 2026).
Quality assurance is further strengthened by integrating the developed learning modules into regular educational programmes, for example as elective modules. As a result, they become part of existing quality assurance systems such as student evaluations and feedback from industry partners (Interview T-shore, 2026).

External partners, particularly companies, play a significant role in quality assurance. They contribute to curriculum development, participate in educational delivery and provide feedback on the practical applicability of skills. Quality assurance within T-shore is

therefore characterised by a combination of structured project management, systematic evaluation and intensive cooperation between education and industry.

When viewed through the lens of the PDCA cycle, all phases can be identified within the project. The Plan and Do phases are clearly reflected in the project structure and the development of learning modules. The Check and Act phases are visible in the systematic evaluation of modules, peer reviews and reflective sessions. Monitoring and evaluation are therefore explicit components of the development process, supporting continuous improvement.

3.3 Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement plays a central role within T-shore and has been embedded in the project from the outset. Educational institutions, companies and other partners collaborate within public-private partnerships, ensuring that stakeholders are directly involved in both the development and delivery of education (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021; Katapult, 2024).

In practice, stakeholder involvement is most visible in direct collaboration with industry. Companies not only provide input but also actively participate in educational activities by delivering guest lectures, supporting practical training and contributing to the development of learning modules. In some cases, education is delivered jointly with companies, making their expertise a structural part of the learning process (Interview T-shore, 2026).

Stakeholders also contribute to testing and improving educational products. The developed learning modules are piloted in regional settings, where companies and other partners provide feedback on content and practical relevance. This feedback is incorporated into further development and shared within the international consortium, creating a continuous cycle of learning and improvement (Interview T-shore, 2026).
At the regional level, stakeholders are organised within public-private partnerships and networks, where companies, educational institutions and, in some cases, public authorities contribute to discussions about educational priorities and sector developments (Katapult, 2024). Their involvement is primarily focused on content and implementation. While stakeholders contribute significantly to educational development and delivery, they are less explicitly involved in formal quality assurance processes.

Stakeholder involvement clearly contributes to the relevance and responsiveness of education. Through close cooperation with industry, practical experiences are translated directly into the curriculum. At the same time, this involvement remains primarily linked to collaboration and co-creation rather than formal quality assurance mechanisms.

3.4 Innovative learning and teaching methods

Within T-shore, considerable emphasis is placed on practice-oriented learning and teaching methods that reflect the demands of the offshore wind sector. Innovation is found less in entirely new pedagogical concepts and more in combining existing approaches with realistic professional situations and sector-specific applications (T-shore Project Consortium, 2021). This approach takes concrete shape in the development of ten harmonised learning modules that integrate theory and practice. The modules are based on a shared competence profile and combine technical skills with attention to safety, teamwork and communication. A defining feature is that students work with situations that closely resemble professional practice, such as maintenance activities and collaboration within an offshore environment (T-shore Education Booklet, n.d.).

Educational delivery is highly practice-oriented. In many cases, students work on industry-based case studies and receive support from professionals working in the sector. Training facilities such as wind turbines and control room environments are sometimes used to recreate authentic working situations (Interview T-shore, 2026). Digital applications also play a role, including e-learning and VR. In particular, VR is used to simulate situations that are difficult to access or potentially hazardous, such as working at sea, enabling students to practise safely in realistic environments (Interview T-shore, 2026).

Teachers play an important role in implementing these educational approaches and translating them into daily practice. In some cases, teachers have completed additional training to strengthen their connection with professional practice (Interview T-shore, 2026). Although the harmonised modules represent a significant achievement, their integration into mainstream curricula is not yet fully established. The modules are often offered as elective components, meaning that long-term sustainability depends partly on the flexibility of existing programmes (Interview T-shore, 2026). The quality of these learning and teaching approaches is mainly assessed through the experiences of students, teachers and companies. Feedback from practice is used to further improve the modules, creating an iterative process of development, testing and refinement.

3.5 Success factors and areas for improvement

The analysis of T-shore reveals a number of success factors as well as challenges and areas for improvement that stem from the way the project has been organised and implemented.

- One important success factor is the continuity of key individuals. Interviews show that several people remained involved throughout the entire project and were already actively engaged during the preparation phase. This continuity has contributed to stability and coherence, which is far from self-evident in large international projects.

- The composition of the consortium has also played an important role. Although not all partners were equally active, vocational education institutions and several training centres often acted as driving forces. They brought relevant expertise and had a direct interest in educational development, which helped maintain project momentum (Interview T-shore, 2026).
- Another strength is the close cooperation between education and industry. In many cases, educational activities are jointly developed and delivered. Companies not only provide input but also contribute directly to training activities, ensuring that education remains closely aligned with professional practice and that feedback can be incorporated quickly.
- A notable achievement is the harmonisation of education. Through the joint development of learning modules and competence profiles, the project succeeded in aligning educational provision across several countries. Interview participants described this as unusual because many international projects focus mainly on knowledge exchange, whereas T-shore resulted in genuinely shared educational products (Interview T-shore, 2026).

At the same time, several areas for improvement emerged.

- Levels of engagement across consortium partners were not always equal. Some organisations played a much more active role than others, highlighting that success depends not only on selecting the right partners but also on the commitment of the individuals involved.
- Another challenge concerns the limited availability of educational development expertise among some partners. Many participants brought valuable sector knowledge but had less experience with curriculum design. In an international context where programmes need to be aligned, such expertise proved to be particularly important. As a result, the project relied heavily on a smaller group of partners with educational backgrounds.
- Sustaining innovations also remains a challenge. The modules are often offered as elective units and have not yet become a structural component of qualification frameworks. Consequently, implementation depends on decisions made by individual institutions and programmes.
- Finally, maintaining long-term cooperation requires ongoing effort. Building trust and sustaining relationships takes time and active investment. Joint meetings and continued contact between partners are therefore considered essential for maintaining collaboration beyond the project's lifetime.

Overall, T-shore demonstrates that success depends strongly on continuity, active partner involvement and close cooperation with industry. At the same time, continued attention is needed for partner selection, educational expertise and the long-term sustainability of project outcomes.

4 Care About IT

4.1 Context, objectives and focus

The CoVE-project Care About IT aims to make healthcare in Europe smarter, more efficient and future-proof by bridging the gap between healthcare, education and IT (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.). The project is coordinated by Noorderpoort and brings together 15 partners from four countries (Estonia, Finland, Italy and the Netherlands), representing vocational education institutions, healthcare organisations and industry partners (European Commission, 2023; Noorderpoort, 2024). In the Netherlands, Care About IT is closely linked to the Care & Technology research centre and to regional initiatives focused on lifelong learning and educational innovation. Notably, the project does not focus solely on students, but also on professionals and teachers (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.).

The project was developed in response to current challenges within the healthcare sector. There is a growing shortage of healthcare professionals, while healthcare environments are becoming increasingly digitalised. In many regions, educational institutions struggle to keep pace with these developments, meaning that students and professionals do not always possess the digital skills required in practice. From this perspective, structural educational innovation is considered necessary (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.; Neth-ER, 2025).

To help future-proof vocational education in healthcare and IT, the project pursues several objectives:

- increasing the number of healthcare professionals (European Commission, 2023);
- preparing healthcare professionals to use digital tools effectively in practice (Noorderpoort, 2024);
- supporting the implementation of HealthTech solutions by strengthening the skills needed for lifelong learning (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.);
- reducing workload through the smart use of technology, thereby improving efficiency and job satisfaction (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.);
- stimulating collaboration between education, industry and healthcare organisations at regional, national and international levels (European Commission, 2023);
- improving healthcare quality and patient satisfaction (Neth-ER, 2025).

The focus of Care About IT is therefore on renewing vocational education in healthcare and IT so that it better reflects both present and future practice. Within the project, this takes shape through:

- developing microcredentials for digital healthcare competences that are suitable for both students and professionals (European Commission, 2023);

- establishing four national CoVEs that together form a European HealthTech platform for knowledge sharing and innovation (European Commission, 2023);
- strengthening international cooperation and knowledge exchange between partners (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.);
- making healthcare and IT programmes more attractive to new target groups (Noorderpoort, 2024);
- integrating innovative learning methods such as simulation-based education, hackathons and practice-oriented IT applications, thereby better preparing students for realistic work situations (Neth-ER, 2025).

4.2 Specific quality assurance measures

The Care About IT project proposal describes a comprehensive quality assurance approach that explicitly adopts a structured method of quality assurance and quality improvement. Central to this approach is the use of the PDCA cycle, aimed at supporting continuous improvement. Quality assurance is organised through a dedicated work package for project management and quality assurance, supported by quality managers in each partner country, an external evaluator, peer reviews and a steering group with fixed structures for monitoring and decision-making. The proposal also includes indicators and KPIs for monitoring progress. These focus primarily on outputs such as numbers of products, meetings and participants, and align closely with the EQAVET framework, where cyclical working and the use of indicators play an important role.

However, the interviews show that quality assurance is experienced somewhat differently in practice (Interview Care About IT, 2026). During implementation, quality assurance tends to take on a more organic and practice-oriented character, with collaboration, development and reflection at its core. Monitoring often takes place through consortium meetings, steering group discussions and peer feedback, rather than through the systematic use of predefined indicators. As a result, quality assurance depends heavily on interaction between partners and it can sometimes be difficult to make project impact visible and measurable.

An important quality assurance instrument is the development of microcredentials for digital healthcare competences. Specific criteria have been developed for these credentials, including clearly formulated learning outcomes, the use of up-to-date and evidence-based sources, and alignment with European competence frameworks. In practice, these criteria function as a quality assurance mechanism, although they are influenced by differences in national regulations and interpretations of quality. In addition, guidelines have been developed for activities such as hackathons, VR-based education and motivating students for HealthTech careers. These guidelines provide useful support for educational teams, although they do not constitute strict standards. Instead, they do refer to European frameworks and also assist teaching educational teams with quality assurance during the design and delivery of education.

International partners play an important role in shaping quality assurance through knowledge sharing, joint development activities and peer reviews. In many respects, quality assurance emerges through dialogue and collaboration. While this creates flexibility and room for adaptation, it also makes the approach less uniform and less explicitly defined. The project is also connected to Noorderpoort's existing quality assurance structures, for example through the Care & Technology research centre and existing curriculum development processes. This makes it easier to integrate innovations into educational practice, although it also means that quality assurance is less visible as a separate system.

When comparing the formal project design with daily practice, it becomes clear that they do not always fully align. On the one hand, there is a robust and structurally designed quality model, while on the other, there is a more implicit, practice-oriented approach to quality assurance. The Plan and Do phases of the PDCA cycle are clearly elaborated, whereas the Check and Act phases are less systematic in practice. Monitoring and evaluation do take place, but often in a qualitative and informal manner. This reflects a broader pattern within vocational education, where educational innovation often progresses rapidly while systematic quality assurance and impact measurement develop more gradually.

4.3 Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement is a key principle within Care About IT and is most visible through concrete project activities. The level of involvement depends largely on the timing, availability of stakeholders and the specific activity for which input is requested. The consortium includes a broad range of stakeholders, including vocational education institutions, healthcare organisations and technology companies (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.). Their contribution focuses mainly on educational development rather than on formal quality assurance processes (Interview Care About IT, 2026).

In practice, stakeholders are involved through activities such as hackathons, pilot projects and consultation sessions. During these activities they share practical experiences and provide input for the development of learning materials (Interview Care About IT, 2026). Interviews with representatives from professional practice are also conducted to gain a better understanding of relevant competences and developments within the sector. This information is subsequently used when developing educational concepts and guidelines. International partners play an important role in this process. Through the exchange of experiences and working methods, partners develop a shared understanding of essential skills and educational approaches. At the same time, this cooperation is primarily content-driven and developmental in nature, rather than focused on creating formal quality assurance structures involving stakeholders.

Within the participating institutions, teachers play a key role in connecting external input with educational practice. In practice, it is often a relatively small group of teachers that

is actively involved in developing and implementing project activities. Engaging a broader group of teachers and creating wider organisational support remains challenging, meaning that stakeholder involvement often depends on individual initiative and professional networks.

This approach clearly contributes to the relevance and responsiveness of the educational programmes. Stakeholder involvement is therefore highly visible, although it is used less explicitly as a mechanism for systematic quality assurance. From an EQAVET perspective, stakeholder involvement is firmly present, but it remains more closely associated with collaboration and co-creation than with formal quality criteria and evaluation mechanisms.

4.4 Innovative learning and teaching methods

A defining characteristic of Care About IT is its strong focus on developing and applying innovative learning and teaching methods that respond to changes within healthcare practice (Care About IT Project Consortium, n.d.; Interview Care About IT, 2026). The project creates considerable room for new forms of education in which technology, practical challenges and interdisciplinary collaboration come together. A range of innovative approaches are used, including hackathons, challenge-based learning and simulation- and VR-based learning environments. The development of microcredentials also plays an important role, supporting flexible and modular learning pathways (European Commission, 2023). These educational approaches are closely linked to professional practice and allow students to work on authentic challenges at the intersection of healthcare and technology.

The development of these innovations takes place in collaboration with international partners and is supported by guidelines and methods such as design thinking and challenge-based learning. Teachers play a central role in designing and delivering these learning activities and work closely with the Care & Technology research centre (Interview Care About IT, 2026).

Although these innovative activities are generally well received, implementation within the organisation remains challenging (Interview Care About IT, 2026). Not all teachers experience the same sense of urgency when it comes to integrating healthcare technology into education, and innovative approaches often remain concentrated within a group of pioneering teachers. In addition, working with these methods requires ongoing professional development and support.

The quality of these innovative learning and teaching methods is primarily assessed through the experiences of students, teachers and partners. This contributes to continuous improvement, although evaluation largely takes place in a qualitative and informal way. From an EQAVET perspective, Care About IT demonstrates that innovative learning and teaching methods contribute significantly to the relevance and currency of education. At the same time, the long-term embedding and scaling-up of these

innovations are still evolving, and the alignment with systematic quality assurance could be further strengthened.

4.5 Success factors and areas for improvement

The analysis of Care About IT highlights a number of clear success factors and areas for improvement that are closely linked to the way the project was organized and implemented.

- One important strength is the strong commitment and motivation of a core team of teachers. Within Care About IT, a group of twelve teachers plays a central role in the development and implementation of educational innovations. They demonstrate ownership, contribute specialist expertise and act as drivers of innovation within the project.
- In addition, the collaboration with the Care & Technology research centre is widely valued because it fosters substantive depth and connects with research and innovation within the institution.
- International cooperation represents another important success factor. Exchanging experiences, ideas and working methods with partners from different countries broadens perspectives on educational innovation and healthcare technology. This collaboration contributes to the professionalization of teachers and fosters new ideas and working methods. At the same time, participation in an international consortium is experienced as motivating and contributes to a sense of shared development and innovation.

Alongside these strengths, several challenges for improvement, primarily relating to the project's positioning and long-term embedding remain in existence.

- For instance, internal support remains limited, and it takes time to raise the visibility of Care About IT and anchor it within broader educational developments.
- Externally, the project is not always viewed as an opportunity for collaboration, instead, it is sometimes perceived as a threat or as overlapping with existing initiatives.
- Cooperation between partners also requires continued attention. Although the project is built on public-private collaboration, partners do not always automatically work from a shared interest. This underlines the importance of carefully selecting partners and investing in sustainable relationships. Changes within the consortium have sometimes made continuity more difficult.
- Finally, embedding the project more broadly within the organisation remains a challenge. Involving a wider group of teachers requires continued attention to professional development and organisational support. In this context, emphasis is placed on the importance of participating teachers visibly acting as ambassadors for the project, so that the innovation gains greater support from within the organization itself.

5 Summary and conclusions

The analysis of Care About IT and T-shore shows that both projects approach quality assurance within the context of Centres of Vocational Excellence in different ways. In both cases, there is a clear connection with the EQAVET framework, particularly in relation to stakeholder involvement and the use and development of innovative learning and teaching methods. At the same time, the way these principles are translated into practice differs between the two projects.

Looking at the first research question, it becomes clear that both projects use a combination of formal and informal quality assurance measures. Both Care About IT and T-shore include structured quality models in their project proposals, making use of indicators, project structures and evaluation moments. In practice, however, collaboration, feedback and joint development play an equally important role. Stakeholder involvement is clearly visible in both projects, particularly through co-creation with industry and professional practice. Innovative learning and teaching methods can be seen in practice-oriented educational activities such as simulations, VR, practical training and hackathons.

Regarding the implementation of quality assurance measures (research question 2), the analysis shows that both projects actively apply these measures, although in different ways. Within Care About IT, quality assurance in practice often emerges through collaboration and reflection, whereas in T-shore the project structure and evaluation activities are more visibly embedded, for example through formal reporting, peer reviews and the testing of educational products in different contexts. In both cases, these approaches contribute to educational quality and effective collaboration between partners. At the same time, measuring impact and making results more visible remain ongoing challenges.

The role of European partners (research question 3) is significant in both projects, although it is expressed differently. Within Care About IT, the emphasis is on joint development and knowledge sharing, with quality assurance largely emerging through dialogue between partners. T-shore, in addition, includes more formal agreements related to project organisation and evaluation, partly driven by European frameworks and project requirements. In both projects, international collaboration clearly influences the way quality assurance is organised, for example through the exchange of practices and the joint development of educational approaches.

When considering the role of the Dutch institutions (research question 4), it becomes apparent that both Scalda and Noorderpoort connect their own quality assurance systems and strategic priorities to the CoVE context in a pragmatic way. They build on existing educational structures and development processes, which makes it relatively easy to embed innovations within their organisations. At the same time, this means that quality

assurance is not always visible as a separate system, but is often intertwined with existing organisational practices.

Finally, both projects demonstrate that success within CoVEs is closely linked to factors such as active partner involvement, continuity in collaboration and strong connections with professional practice (research question 5). Similar areas for attention can also be identified, including the creation of broad organisational support, the sustainable embedding of innovations within regular curricula and making quality arrangements and impact more explicit. The analysis further suggests that the availability of educational expertise and the careful selection of partners can have a considerable influence on both the quality of outcomes and the progress of a project.

Overall, Care About IT and T-shore show that quality assurance within CoVEs can take different forms depending on the context and design of a project. Both projects offer valuable insights into how collaboration, innovation and quality development can be shaped in practice, and can therefore serve as a source of inspiration for other initiatives within vocational education and training.

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