Overview of EQAVET

Leonardo da Vinci project BEQUAL +

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1 Policy context

1.1　　　　Copenhagen process

The Barcelona European Council in 2002 (European Council, 2002) set as a target to make Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010. Since then important steps have been made towards this objective. The Copenhagen declaration (European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, European Commission, 2002) set the basis for the development of a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET in Europe (CQAF). In May 2004, the European Council endorsed the CQAF (Council of the European Union, 2004a). The CQAF builds on the target set by the European Council, and is included in the report on the follow-up of the objectives of Education and Training systems in Europe. Its main purpose is to provide a simple and easy to use framework, which can be applied to VET systems and providers, and can serve as a tool for policy developers and practitioners in their efforts to improve the quality of VET services and training provisions. The use of CQAF is voluntary and the primary users are national/regional authorities, public and private bodies (including training providers) in charge of quality assurance and improvement.

The European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) established in October 2005, a voluntary cooperation forum, provided a number of initiative and projects at European and national levels, which were carried out to support, test and refine the CQAF. In 2009, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Recommendation on establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF) (European Parliament and Council, 2009a). It invites Member States, by 2011, to develop an approach to improve their quality assurance systems and to make best use of the framework. EQARF is based on and improves CQAF. In 2010, ENQA – VET was replaced by European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), a community of practice bringing together Member States, Social Partners and the European Commission to promote European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET by using the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework.

The Bruges Communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, European Social Partners, the European Commission, 2010) reviewed the strategic approaches and priorities of the Copenhagen process and set the roadmap for VET for 2011-2020. Transparency and quality assurance are important for VET, in order to build up mutual trust and facilitate mobility. The dimension of quality mentioned in Bruges Communiqué are: attractiveness of initial VET, quality assurance of VET provision, quality of teachers, trainers and other VET professionals and relevance of training to the needs of the labour market.

1.2　　　　The role of quality in the modernisation of VET

Compared to general education and higher education, VET is less regulated. There is great diversity not only between different Member States, but also between sectors, regions, levels and types of VET. The importance of VET is constantly increasing, especially in the nowadays social and economic context, with increased unemployment rates, uncertainty and major social challenges. Accelerated by the

Copenhagen process, VET reforms have been and are being implemented in all Member States, although at different paces. Major developments at European and national level of the first decade of the new century are:

(a) The introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs).

According to EQF recommendation (European Parliament; Council, 2008), the development of National Qualification Frameworks and their reference to EQF should be done with quality assurance principles, explicitly mentioned in the Recommendation. In September 2010, 31 EU/EEA countries have developed/are developing and introducing NQFs (Zahilas, 2011). Four countries (UK, Ireland, France and Malta) (European Commission, 2011) have already referred their NQF to the EQF. The referencing process, developed by the EQF Advisory Group (European Commission, 2009) has two criteria relevant to quality assurance. Namely, criterion 5 previews that "The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in annex 3 of the Recommendation)" and criterion 6 previews that "The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies". The referencing reports of Member States document the way, in which they address the referencing criteria.

(b) Developments of credit systems and ECVET.

ECVET recommendation (European Parliament, Council 2009b) invites Member States to apply the common principles for quality assurance in VET (Council of the European Union, 2004a) when using ECVET. Quality assurance is a core issue for building mutual trust in ECVET partnerships and quality assurance principles and criteria are documented in ECVET documents, i.e. Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreements. European Member States have adopted measures to implement ECVET, following the recommendation. ECVET is actually implemented mainly through pilot projects, nevertheless in certain countries the development of credit systems is linked to their national qualification frameworks and/or broader VET reforms (Cedefop, 2010).

(c) Development of validation systems for non-formal and informal learning.

Among the common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (Council of the European Union, 2004b) is the obligation of the stakeholders to establish appropriate quality mechanisms for the identification and validation of non –formal and informal learning. Quality assurance mechanisms should underpin processes, procedures and criteria for validation, in order to build confidence and trust. Member States and European Commission are invited to support the development of quality assurance mechanisms.

According to the European inventory on validation of informal and non formal learning (Hawley et al, 2011), there are few countries with high level of development of validation systems (i.e. France, Finland), while in the majority of Member States, there are validation practices in certain sectors and/or levels and types of VET.

(d) Extensive use of Europass documents.

Europass as a framework for enhancing transparency of qualifications in the world of education and the labour market has been gaining acceptance. The first evaluation of

Europass (Ecotec, 2008) indicates successful implementation of Europass, especially of Europass CV and Language Passport. There is further potential for the Europass Certificate Supplement, Europass Mobility and Europass Diploma Supplement, as their use presents obstacles in certain countries. According to the evaluation Europass can be used as a quality assurance framework for the identification and documentation of learning outcomes and transparency of qualifications. On the other hand, quality assurance is an important factor in the use of Europass documents, especially Europass Mobility, in order to facilitate understandability of qualifications.

Quality assurance is linked with and facilitates adoption of European instruments and tools of the Copenhagen process, i.e. ECVET, EQF, validation of non-formal and informal learning and Europass. All these instruments have as objective the facilitation of mobility, through transparency of qualifications and quality assurance is an important factor for building mutual trust.

2 European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET)

2.1   The EQARF Recommendation

On June 2009, the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF Recommendation) was issued. With EQARF the Member States are recommended to:

1. use and further develop the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (the Framework), quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators as set out and further described in Annexes I and II, to further improve and develop their VET systems, support lifelong learning strategies and the implementation of the EQF and of the European Quality Charter for Mobility, and promote a culture of quality improvement and innovation at all levels. Extra emphasis should be placed on the transition from VET to higher education;

2. each devise, not later than 18 June 2011, an approach aimed at improving quality assurance systems at national level, where appropriate, and making best use of the framework, involving the social partners, regional and local authorities, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with national legislation and practice;

3. participate actively in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network (the framework network) as a basis for further development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators, guidelines and tools for quality improvement in VET at national, regional and local levels, as appropriate;

4. establish, where this does not already exist, a Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET that is linked to the particular structures and requirements of each Member State and that, in accordance with national practice, brings together existing relevant bodies and involves the social partners and all stakeholders concerned at national and regional levels, in order to ensure the follow- up of initiatives. The reference points should:

— keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the activities of the framework network,

— provide active support for the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

— take concrete initiatives to promote further development of the framework in the national context,

— support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance which allows the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement in respect of the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

— ensure that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively;

5. undertake a review of the implementation process every four years — such review to be incorporated into every second national progress report drawn up within the context of the future strategic framework for European cooperation in education and

training — on the basis of reference criteria to be defined under the framework network in cooperation with the Commission and the Member States.

Furthermore EQARF endorses the European Commission's intention to:

1. support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, in particular by facilitating cooperation and mutual learning, testing and developing guidance material, and providing information on quality developments in VET across Member States;

2. promote and participate together with the Member States in the framework network, contributing to policy development in this area through concrete proposals and initiatives, as appropriate;

3. ensure follow-up to the implementation of this recommendation by presenting a report every four years to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review of this recommendation conducted in cooperation with the Member States and involving the various stakeholders;

4. undertake, on the basis of that report and in cooperation with the Member States, an evaluation of the implementation of this recommendation and, if necessary, its revision.

2.2 The framework

The EQAFR recommendation establishes a European quality assurance reference framework ('the framework') which comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation/ assessment and review/revision) based on a selection of quality criteria, descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels. The aim is not to introduce new standards, but to support Member States' efforts, whilst preserving the diversity of their approaches.

The Framework should be regarded rather as a 'toolbox', from which the various users may choose those descriptors and indicators that they consider most relevant to the requirements of their particular quality assurance system.

The proposed descriptors and indicators are provided as guidance only and may be selected and applied by users of the Framework in accordance with all or part of their requirements and existing settings.

They may be applied to initial vocational training (IVT) and/or continuous vocational training (CVT), depending on the relevant individual characteristics of each Member State's VET system and the type of VET providers.

They are to be used on a purely voluntary basis, taking account of their potential added value and in accordance with national legislation and practice. They should be considered neither as benchmarks, nor as a means of reporting on, or drawing comparisons between, the quality and efficiency of different national systems. The responsibility for monitoring the quality of these systems remains entirely with the Member States.

2.2.1 Quality Criteria and Indicative Descriptors

Annex I of the EQARF Recommendation proposes common quality criteria and indicative descriptors to support Member States, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the Framework.

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria) Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/ regional data protection requirements Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined	European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place
Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels	Resources are appropriately internally aligned/ assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans

	Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support	Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned
	Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels	The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers
	Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers	Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance
	VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET- provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation	
Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers
	Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described	Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction
	The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector	
	Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as	Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and

	appropriate	external stakeholders
	Early warning systems are implemented	Early warning systems are implemented
	Performance indicators are applied	
	Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement.	
	Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics	
Review	Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels	Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers' feedback this is used to inform further actions
	Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are adjusted accordingly	Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available
	Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available	Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation
		Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place

2.2.2 A reference set of selected quality indicators for assessing Quality in VET

Annex II proposes a comprehensive set of selected quality indicators which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers. The set of indicators will be further developed through European

cooperation on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis, building on European data and national registers.

The table of indicators does not include aggregated indicators at national level in cases where these do not exist or are difficult to obtain. The aggregation of such indicators at national level can be carried out at a later stage on the basis of a joint agreement between the Member States, the Commission and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network.

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance		
No 1 Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers: (a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative (b) share of accredited VET providers	Context/Input indicator	Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level Increase the transparency of quality of training Improve mutual trust on training provision
No 2 Investment in training of teachers and trainers: (a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training (b) amount of funds invested	Input/Process indicator	Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market Increase individual learning capacity building Improve learners' achievement
Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies		
No 3 Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes (1),	Input/Process/Output indicator	Obtain basic information

according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (2)		at VET- system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups
No 4 Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Outcome indicator	Support employability Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
No 6 Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: (a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria (b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)	Increase employability Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
Context information		
No 7 Unemployment rate (4) according to individual criteria	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level
No 8 Prevalence of vulnerable groups: (a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training

gender (b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender		provision for disadvantaged groups
No 9 Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: (a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	Context/Input indicator (qualitative information	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support employability
No 10 Schemes used to promote better access to VET: (a) information on existing schemes at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	Process indicator (qualitative information)	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision

Notes:

(1) For IVT: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant. For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.

(2) Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrants, persons with disabilities, length of unemployment.

(3) For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.

(4) Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.

3 Quality management in VET provider organisations

3.1 Creation of a quality culture

The EQARF recommendation strengthens the role of Member States and European Commission for the adoption and further development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework, following a top-down approach. Following the recommendation, Member States are invited to device an approach aiming at improving quality assurance systems, establish a Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET, participate in EQAVET network and undertake a review of the implementation process every four years.

Quality assurance mechanisms, approaches and tools at system level (i.e. national, regional, and sector level) are important for creating a quality culture in VET. Quality management in VET should be seen as an overall system, in which policy makers, stakeholders, social partners and VET providers have an important role. There is an interrelation between on the one hand quality assurance approaches at national, regional and sector levels and on the other hand internal quality management approaches at VET provider level. Needless to say, the role of VET provider organisations in adopting and further developing their own quality management approaches is very important. Quality of VET at system level presupposes the prevalence of a culture of quality at VET provider level. The VET provider organisations are called to design and deliver VET programmes, each one of them responsible and accountable for its own pedagogical outputs, the return on investment and most of all the employability of their trainees. The aggregate pedagogical outputs of VET providers constitute the VET provision at system level.

Internal quality culture is first of all sensitisation towards change, introduction of innovations and continuous improvement on one hand and willingness to engage into a learning and a learning to learn process. This, although seems evident for organisations providing learning, is not always so, for a numbers of reasons (strong tradition, rigid institutional framework, management style etc.). Quality culture demands to have open antennas and perceptiveness of stimulus coming from the context. Changes in training technology and therefore in resources needed, changes in qualifications and therefore in learning outcomes required, expansion and need to assure quality in a decentralised system, changes in the competition and therefore seeking for ways to cope with this situation or just the simple need to survive in a very tough economic context are some examples of factors that push VET providers to adopt their own quality approach and culture.

Quality management is a basic pillar of any organisation affecting the performance of the organisation and the quality of the outputs (products and services). In particular in VET, quality of pedagogical outputs has an impact at individual level and at society level. At individual level, quality of pedagogical outputs affects the trainees in multiple ways, including self – esteem and confidence, employability, flexibility to adapt to changing demands of the labour market, geographical and sector mobility, transferability and accumulation of learning outcomes. At society level, quality of pedagogical outputs affects inter alia the employment, the growth and development of regions and sectors, the social and vocational rehabilitation of disadvantaged groups, the culture towards learning and innovation and the long-term economic sustainability.

The need to promote vocational education and training and make it more attractive is another driver for creating a quality culture. VET providers need to improve their status in the overall training system and provide high quality pedagogical outputs and better employability prospects as alternative to other educational pathways.

At European level, quality assurance is strongly linked to transparency of qualifications and mobility of learners and workers. At a macro-level quality assurance is linked to and supports the implementation of European instruments and tools (section 3.2). At VET provider level, quality assurance plays a vital role in building mutual trust and transparency.

Quality assurance must not be seen as an institutional requirement or as unnecessary administrative bargain, rather than as an integral prerequisite in all processes and procedures of a VET provider. Quality management should underpin the performance of any VET provider organisation. It is important that quality management approaches are adapted to the policy, vision, mission and particular characteristics of a VET provider organisation and not solely conform to institutional requirements. The particular characteristics of a VET provider that have to be taken into consideration are: the type of training (initial/continuing, formal/non-formal, school-based/work-based), the level of VET, the type of beneficiaries (young people, unemployed, disadvantaged groups, etc), the type of funding (private/public) and the type of organisation (size, governance, profit/non-profit). An effective quality management system should respond to characteristics and needs of each organisation as well as to national, regional and sectoral policies and practices for quality assurance.

The creation of quality culture at VET provider level relies on commitment and engagement of management, administrative and pedagogic staff to quality management. The top management should take all necessary measures to provide the required resources, in terms of staff, facilities and equipment. All members of staff should have a role and be engaged in quality assurance. A designated management representative should ensure quality management that is quality planning, quality assurance and continuous quality improvement.

Finally, the effectiveness and efficiency of VET is important. Whatever the source of funding, public or private, there is an interest from stakeholders to assure the return on investment.

3.2 Challenges

The quality culture has to underpin the whole VET institution driving its management, its staff, its operations and its services towards continuous improvement. The design and implementation of quality management systems by VET providers presents a number of challenges. For the presentation, we categorise the challenges in the four steps of the quality cycle (European Parliament, Council 2009a).

<u>Planning</u>

The planning of a quality management system in a VET provider reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/ objectives, actions and indicators.

A quality management system should take into account the internal characteristics of the organisation as well as the operating environment. The operating environment is a complex system that includes:

- local environment: training needs, local companies, population, competition;

- national/regional environment: VET policies, VET tradition, VET authorities, VET networks, involvement of stakeholders and social partners, institutional requirements;

- European level: EU policies, instruments and tools.

The challenges for a VET provider are to obtain and validate information of the operating environment, to follow evolutions in rapid changing conditions and to satisfy possibly contradictory needs.

A key element of the quality management system is the definition of goals and objectives – taking into account the internal characteristics of the VET provider and the operating environment. Goals and objectives should be realistic and measurable. The fulfilment of goals and objectives is operationalised into concrete processes and expected outputs.

The process of defining goals and objectives may include different stakeholders, such as funding authorities, regulating organisations, social partners, companies, trainees, at different levels of the operating environment. Building consensus and engaging the different actors involved in planning may present a challenge.

Planning should be customer-focused, or in other words to be oriented towards filling the needs of customers. This presents another challenge as the VET provider has to define clearly its customers and their needs (e.g. are customers the funding bodies or the company ordering the training or the trainees themselves and what are the customer needs exactly?).

Design of training provided as well as of resources needed is another function of the planning step. Selection of the appropriate pedagogical approach, technology, qualification of staff involved, taking into account of environmental management and social responsibility aspects and most of all quality of the VET product are some of the factors that may embrace the quality culture at this step. At the same time the selection of these factors as well as of the respective indicators to be used in order to evaluate outputs and their impact constitute challenges for the VET institutions.

Another important aspect of a quality management system is cost effectiveness. There are two dimensions of cost. Firstly, there is the overall planning of resources of a VET institution and the securing of the appropriate funding. Resource planning should take into account available resources in relation to needs and expected results. Secondly, there is the cost of the quality management system (quality cost). Quality cost should be proportional to the overall budget of the organisation. The implication of this statement is that the complexity (and as a consequence the cost) of a quality management system, increases with the size, the complexity and the operation of a VET provider, although, there is no linear correlation between the two variables. Quality management systems that are unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic are less accepted and may have a reverse effect on the commitment of the actors responsible for their implementation and the quality culture in the VET provider.

Implementation

The implementation of a quality management system requires commitment of management and staff and engagement of the relevant persons in daily operations. Quality assurance underpins all business processes and procedures as well as the pedagogical processes and outputs of the VET provider. The role of people, i.e. management, administrative staff and trainers is the most important factor of success. The challenge for the VET provider is to assure the engagement of personnel.

The quality policy and quality objectives of the VET provider should be communicated internally and externally, i.e. to staff and to stakeholders. Communication of policy and objectives is an important first step to involve actively people in the quality cycle and although it is logical, in practice it is not obvious.

The stakeholders involved in the quality management of a VET provider are diversified. Depending on the type of the institution, stakeholders can be VET authorities and organisations at national, regional and local level, professional and sector organisations, networks, social partners, companies – collaborators or customers, trainees and their representative organisations and the VET provider staff. The operation of a VET provider and therefore its quality management system depend to a certain degree on the source of funding and to institutional requirements. The VET provider has to identify and ensure involvement of stakeholders, balance the needs and expectations of all involved parties and at the same time follow the rules. The satisfaction of stakeholders can be a challenge, as they may have different expectations. Regularly, there are contradictions between different stakeholders: e.g. rules and control imposed by the operating environment and the need for autonomy of a VET provider, expectations and aspirations of individual trainees and the needs of economy and society.

Quality assurance is very often an institutional requirement. Institutional requirements may range from strict rules that must be followed to recommendations. The VET provider has certain degrees of freedom to design and implement a quality management approach, depending on the institutional requirements. A quality management system should be adapted to the particular characteristics of the VET provider. A robust quality management system can serve the scope of a large and complex organisation, but in a small organisation may cause unnecessarily high administrative cost and reduce flexibility. Over-regulation may inhibit innovativeness and use of creativity for finding solutions. A quality management approach is not 'one fits all'. A VET provider has to select between different approaches taking into consideration, internal and external environment as well as the cost. The challenge is to implement quality assurance approaches, balanced between the need for robustness, standards and documentation and the need for cost effectiveness, simplicity and flexibility.

Evaluation

In the quality management cycle evaluation of processes and outcomes has the meaning of measuring processes and outcomes against the set objectives, criteria and expected results. Evaluation approaches range from self-evaluation to external evaluation and control. Peer review and benchmarking supervised by networks is also gaining ground in VET.

Self – evaluation of VET providers is a practice in some Member States, in some it is an institutional requirement, while in others it is voluntary based. There is a tendency

for combining self – evaluation with external review. Identifying the right balance between the two methods is a challenge (Cedefop, 2009).

Evaluation should involve interested stakeholders including students and trainees. There are two dimensions that should be taken into account. Firstly, there is the assessment of learning outcomes that is a measurement of the quality of the pedagogical methods and means. Secondly, there is the measurement of outputs of the learning process, in a more wide sense, e.g increase in employability, social inclusion, self-satisfaction. The second dimension is equally important, because it provides feedback to the overall operation of a VET provider, from planning to continuous improvement, but also is of high importance to the funding organisations. Evaluation in VET providers usually has the form of either formative evaluation (which takes place during the period of training and permits corrective actions) or summative evaluation (some time after the end of the training to assess the impact of training).The challenge for evaluation is to measure the pedagogical work of a VET provider, keeping a broad perspective in the overall performance of the organisation.

External assessment takes various forms. It can be a regulatory requirement or voluntary- based. It can be performed by VET authorities, independent assessment bodies, certifying or accrediting bodies, public or private. External assessment also depends on the use of standards, such as ISO 9001, ISO 10015, EFQM, national quality labels and standards and other quality standards not directly related to the pedagogical work, such as environmental, social accountability standards. The selection of external assessment and certification bodies is a challenge.

Review

The result of the evaluation is the basis for correcting, preventing and improving actions. Correcting processes address mistakes and faults, (non conformities) identified during evaluation. Preventing actions address possible non-conformities. Corrective and preventing processes aim to improve the processes that generate mistakes, so as to lessen similar non-conformities in the future. The quality management system should have a continuous improvement character and include review processes for identification of aspects for improvement. The planning of processes for review should be adhered to the planning of the quality management. In practise VET institutions focus more on quality assurance and less to improvement because the later needs strong commitment to change, to innovation and development of a learning culture. The implementation of a quality management system, with a strong focus on quality improvement embedded from the planning phase is a challenge.

Communication of review outcomes to stakeholders and staff facilitates their commitment and involvement and promotes transparency. The development of processes for communication of review outcomes is a challenge. The operating environment is complex and the involvement of different types of stakeholders increase the degree of complexity. The VET provider should identify the relevant key information that should be communicated and use appropriate methods and tools for communication

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3.3   Organisational and technical issues

The most relevant organisational and technical aspects of the implementation of a quality management approach in a VET provider are:

- Internal environment

The characteristics of the organisation: the type of training (initial/continuing, formal/non-formal, school-based/work-based), the level of VET qualifications offered and as an implication the qualification level of the trainees, the type of beneficiaries (young people, unemployed, disadvantaged groups, etc), the type of funding (private/public) and the type of organisation (size, governance, profit/non-profit).

- Operating environment

The national, regional, local policies and practices. The local environment in which the VET provider operates: urban or rural area, population, migration, existence of groups at risk, culture and tradition, main sectors of economy, companies.

Taking into account environmental management and social responsibility in the four steps of quality management seem to be presently some of the most "forgotten" or marginal elements for most VET providers (BEQUAL, 2011).

Competition is for sure a very potent motivation. Adopting a quality culture as a proactive driver rather than as a re-active one is a major challenge.

- Institutional and regulatory requirements

Existence of obligatory or voluntary frameworks, rules, standards at national, regional, local or sectoral level. Existence of common practices, culture and traditions that may informally constitute requirements.

- Management

Governance of the VET provider, level of autonomy, involvement of social partners and/or other stakeholders in decision making. Commitment of managing board to quality and engagement of executive managers to design and implementation of quality management approaches.

- Quality policy and objectives

Quality policy in conformance with internal characteristics and the operating environment. Quality criteria for processes and outputs with focus to pedagogical results. Clear and measurable objectives and indicators. Involvement of staff and stakeholders in drawing quality policy and objectives. Verification of quality objectives.

- Resources

Facilities, technology, equipment, material and human resources. Special needs of and provisions for groups at risk. Source of funding.

- Staff

Involvement of staff to quality management, allocation of responsibilities, communication channels, communication of quality policy, objectives and expected results.

- Training

Training of personnel, training of teachers / trainers, importance of qualified trainers in quality assurance.

- Stakeholders

Identification of stakeholders, consultation and active involvement, engagement of stakeholders at different steps of the quality management cycle.

- Networks and partnerships

Cooperation with other VET providers and with other types of organisations, e.g VET authorities and organisations, social partners, enterprise networks, companies, representatives of the target groups, associations of social groups.

- Processes

Planning, implementation, evaluation and review of business and pedagogical processes, definition of inputs, methods and outputs, quality objectives and criteria, ownership and responsibilities.

- Results

 Pedagogical results, learning outcomes, outcomes on individuals, outcomes on society, outcomes on environment, organisational outcomes, learning process.

- Documentation

Documentation of processes and procedures. Records, processes for issuing, verifying and keeping records, processes for analysing data.

- Continuous improvement

Corrective and preventing actions. Processes for gathering feedback, analysing data, revising objectives and processes. Active involvement of the staff in the continuous improvement process is a challenge that enhances learning, creativity, trust and open communication within the VET institution.

3.4 Tools and mechanisms for promoting quality culture

Most common quality assurance approaches in VET providers include self-assessment, peer review, benchmarking, external reviews and audits, accreditation of VET providers, quality management systems based on standards, including standards from the business sector.

In most countries self-evaluation is a key quality management approach (Cedefop, 2009). Self-evaluation can be compulsory or voluntary. A number of countries have implemented national self-assessment frameworks to guide and support VET providers in self-assessment. Typically, self assessment is conducted in a yearly basis. The outcome is a self-assessment report that is usually made public.

External evaluation is a broad term; it can include evaluation of a VET institution performance by independent experts / auditors, by designated experts from VET authorities or by peers. The form of external evaluation depends on the quality approach of the VET provider. The adoption of a quality standard, such as ISO 9001, requires external audits by independent certifying organisations at regular intervals. The accreditation of a VET provider may imply audits by reviewers / auditors of the accrediting organisation or by external experts. The adoption of quality frameworks, quality labels and standards, specifically designed for VET may imply external audits. External evaluation may be combined with and complement self-evaluation.

Peer review is a promising instrument of quality management in VET. While peer review is prevalent in higher education, its use in VET is marginal (Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training, 2007). Peer review consists of external evaluation of VET providers by peers that is an external group of experts coming from other VET providers or stakeholders. Peers are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with the persons whose performance is being reviewed. Peer review is a cost effective method, it is carried out by persons who have in depth knowledge of the learning process, it fosters networking and exchange between VET providers.

Following a preliminary review of the existing bibliography quality approaches for VET institutions focus mainly on quality assurance.

Promotion of quality culture in a VET institution means to insert additionally to quality assurance the concept of continuous improvement. The systematic exploration of quality standards of the business sector can be of benefit to VET institutions. Quality culture may be enhanced through mechanisms and tools as described in the following:

- Rationale. Why to introduce a quality culture in my institution?

The management of the VET institution has to be persuaded that internal quality of culture is a requirement for the institution, that quality is not just an institutional requirement deriving from the EU, the state, the region or the customer but that it is a sine non qua for business operation and provides useful information for management decisions, eliminating sources of conflict with customers and suppliers continuously improving the institution's performance and image. Furthermore, it is a revitalising culture, rendering the staff of the VET institution active in learning, proposing and implementing innovations and improvement and that perhaps the very survival of the institution depends on the adoption of the appropriate quality management approach. To this end, the proposal of the contractor for the training handbook includes explanation in simple words about quality policies and the 4 phases quality cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review revision). Furthermore it will illustrate arguments and examples coming from the comparative analysis of the case studies depicting the meaning of these arguments.

- Relevance to the specific VET institution. The quality culture is useful, but isn't it possible for other types of VET institutions?

The management of the VET institution has to be persuaded that the adoption of an internal quality culture is possible for their specific case. To this end, it is useful to demonstrate how different VET institutions of different types, addressing different target groups of different ages in different national/regional sectorial contexts have coped with this issue. Some examples coming from the case studies and comparative tables can contribute to this end.

- Practical aid to set quality objectives. How can I put management objectives concerning quality?

In some cases management objectives concerning quality are implicit. VET providers would be helped by some examples of management objectives concerning quality. It has also to be clear that management objectives for quality should be quantifiable and promoted publicly within the VET institution. This will have a positive effect in the

active involvement of the staff as far as quality assurance and improvement is concerned. It will also prove to be beneficial to the VET institution if the management objectives for quality are publicised for stakeholders and interested third parties to be informed in this respect.

- Prerequisites for the development of quality culture. What is the most crucial factor in the development of a quality culture in my institution?

There are in fact two very crucial factors. The first one is the commitment of management in the development of the quality culture, as shown above, and the second one is the active and wholehearted involvement of the staff of the institution. This is up to the management to find ways to gain. On the other hand the communication of quality management objectives, open communication channels, asking for contribution in finding solutions to problems etc, have proven to be useful in many cases. A list with attitudes that are positive and others that are inhibiting may be of help.

- Quality processes. What sort of processes may be useful in my case for quality management as far as planning and/or implementation and/or evaluation and/or reviewing/revising are concerned?

It has to be clarified that there is no magic recipe for quality management. Each institution has to find the approach that best suits its needs. One may also go further and say that the quality approach itself is subject to continuous revision, innovation, change and improvement. A tool, namely a list with examples of processes and approaches of various VET institutions per process may be useful though, providing input and being a basis for development of ideas for the own approach to quality.

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