

## **Recommendations and Guidelines for the Transfer of the Net-Working for Quality Assurance model to other member states and within countries**

When the Net-working for Quality Assurance (NQA) project idea was first envisaged it clearly aimed to meet a need identified within a small community in north Dublin. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important resource for many local people leading to sustainable and quality employment. Furthermore, quality in both VET and basic initial education is an important factor for both learners and their career guidance practitioners when deciding on a programme of study, as it assures that the learner has a quality journey. Staff working in career guidance services and in various VET related organisations require some indicators of quality so as to ensure that decisions made by learners will be decisions that lead to further or higher education and training, or indeed into employment.

Starting from these preconditions the NQA project planned also to involve a number of European partners. The aim was to test the effectiveness of an interagency approach at local and national levels in order to improve awareness of the strategic aspects of QA in VET and to develop suitable tools to strengthen the culture of Quality.

Member states are at various stages of implementation of quality assurance systems and during the NQA project research phase we found that although VET systems were fairly similar across countries there seems to be inconsistencies in the way in which QA systems are implemented within those VET systems. As a result QA systems although based on the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training model (EQAVET) are implemented through varying structures and institutions, often as these structures were in place before the QA systems were developed.

With this in mind the EQAVET model was developed as a flexible model that could be used to guide the development of QA systems and their implementation across member states, with their differing institutions and structures. A recent report by the Commission to the European Parliament and the

Council on the Evaluation of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance reference framework for Vocational Education and Training (2014)<sup>1</sup> outlined that:

- EQAVETs flexible approach has facilitated its use at national level, even if countries do not adopt the whole EQAVET cycle approach
- EQAVET has contributed to the development of a quality culture and to the development of operational measures
- but EQAVETs flexibility has reduced its impact as a common language<sup>2</sup>

The report also highlights that there is a need to 'improve the coherence between quality assurance in different education sub-sectors, and furthering synergies and convergence of EU transparency and recognition tools' (pg. 4)<sup>3</sup>. It also highlights the need to improve governance at both EU and National levels by involving more stakeholders and by involving stakeholders at all stages of implementation.

With these recommendations in mind, which clearly relate to the breadth and depth of EQAVET impact, alongside concerns that while EQAVET is a flexible approach it reduces its impact as a common language, the importance of a model which is both cross sectoral and applicable to all stakeholders and which aims to develop a culture of quality and a common language should be tested on a wider scale. The NQA project aimed to develop such a model and materials which could be used to support this work.

At the final stages of the NQA project, partners brought the work to a conclusion which is visible in the project results (NQA model, NQA Training, NQA Website etc.)<sup>4</sup>. However the sustainability of the project within partner countries and its transferability to other countries and regions was an important consideration for each individual partner. This project set out to establish local stakeholder groups, learner groups and national stakeholder groups to enable bottom up and top down communication and to promote the development of a common language.

### **Key principles for all stakeholders**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

[http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Annual\\_Forum\\_2014/Report\\_Euroepan\\_Commission\\_on\\_EQAVET\\_Sophie\\_Weisswange\\_1.sflb.ashx](http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Annual_Forum_2014/Report_Euroepan_Commission_on_EQAVET_Sophie_Weisswange_1.sflb.ashx)

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [www.n4qa.eu](http://www.n4qa.eu)

From our experience over the lifetime of the NQA project we identified a number of key principles or *Lessons from the NQA project* which could be considered by all stakeholders if they wish to adopt the model or elements of it to their region.

- Bottom up and top down engagement of stakeholders is essential for the design and implementation of quality systems at national, regional and local levels.
- Bottom-up engagement in particular is essential for developing quality culture and closing the quality cycle which is not currently a prominent feature of most quality systems.
- Interagency working at local levels can be used as a way of bringing together stakeholders. It further facilitates the development of quality culture and raises *Quality* awareness at local levels.
- Interagency working requires commitment and careful nurturing
- Interagency working supports the development of champions of quality at local levels
- Champions of quality at national levels enables meaningful bottom-up engagement
- Learners perceptions of quality should underpin continuous improvement
- Leadership at learner, local and national levels is key to inclusive and meaningful quality assurance

### **Recommendations for Policy makers**

At national levels those responsible for policy in QA in VET ultimately design the specification for Quality system what will be implemented. The following recommendations could be considered by VET policy makers and perhaps incorporated into Quality systems from the top down:

- Quality assurance affects all stakeholders, and is affected by all stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholder involvement at design and implementation stages of QA systems is essential to ensure policy proofing, stakeholder buy in and successful implementation.
- Stakeholder involvement ensures knowledge sharing and capacity building across all sectors and at all levels, allowing for meaning to be attributed to the quality system and its objectives.
- Stakeholder involvement enables the development of a culture of Quality and subsequently a common language. This culture and language is then spread at regional and local levels ensuring a trickledown effect.

- Promote the establishment of learner, local and national interagency stakeholder groups which will nurture the culture of Quality at varying stakeholder levels
- Recommend effective leadership in all stakeholder groups, aiming to develop shared purpose, clarification of roles and responsibilities and the development of mutual respect and trust.
- Encourage the establishment of communication channels which allow for both top down and bottom up engagement. These channels must be accessible to all stakeholder levels and allow for communication to be initiated by both those at front line delivery levels (bottom up) and at policy/decision making levels (top-down).
- Promote a culture of quality, a common language and a closed quality cycle from the top down, illustrating the importance of all stakeholders in the provision of quality assured VET.

### **Recommendations for Local and Regional transfer**

For stakeholders at regional or local levels, where implementation of the QA system into daily practices within VET institutions and centres is a core aspect of the work, a 'feeling' of Quality must be evident. At the practice level the learner is at the centre of the service delivery and so quality systems should assure a quality journey for each individual learner. The NQA partners recommend the adoption of the NQA model, where a quality culture is developed by local stakeholders and facilitated through an interagency approach. The following recommendations are based on the experience of the NQA partners:

- Establish an interagency group by inviting stakeholders to become involved from the outset. This enables a sense of ownership and a belief that all stakeholder members are an important element of the interagency group.
- Leadership is a key role in interagency working and requires an individual who can foster mutual respect and trust within the group.
- Building a strong interagency group takes time and commitment but provides members with a sense that they are working towards a shared common goal or purpose.
- Start to develop links with national stakeholders so they are aware of the interagency group and its purpose.
- Seek out opportunities for members of the interagency group to meet with national stakeholders around issues of common interest.
- Further develop relationships with national QA stakeholders and establish meaningful communication channels.

- Utilise the NQA materials!

For more information see [www.n4qa.eu](http://www.n4qa.eu)