

**QUINORA Guidelines for Quality Development in
Vocational Orientation and Activation Measures for
Job-Seekers on the System Level**

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1 QUINORA an Overview

The central content wise goal of the EU financed Leonardo Da Vinci Program QUINORA, operating from 2005 to 2007, is to develop a quality assurance program for vocational orientation and activation measures based on international quality standards and to combine them with an e-learning tool and an e-library. Ultimately it is aimed at integrating the critical-discursive "results of QUINORA" on the meta-/system level of the participating labour market agents involved in vocational orientation and activation. Also the implementation of the "products of QUINORA" on the management level (use in day-to-day business) is a goal QUINORA is striving for.

The following countries are participating in QUINORA: Austria (Co-ordination of the project by abif¹) Bulgaria, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain.

QUINORA can therefore be interpreted as an "European answer" to the internationalisation of vocational counselling and career guidance. Against the backdrop of an on-going critical quality discussion QUINORA wants to contribute to establishing benchmarks and disseminating "Best Practices" on a European level.

On the basis of a comparative Synthesis-Report, in the course of which the current situation concerning quality in vocational orientation and counselling was investigated, international guidelines for vocational orientation and activation measures will be developed. Those guidelines could also deliver an interesting (discussion) input for labour market related qualification measures or in further education for adults.

All this will not be done – as is the custom – focussing exclusively on trainer's competences, quality in training or the quality management of training institutions, but also taking into consideration the interaction of stakeholders in planning, realisation and post-processing (Analysis of feedback, control of success by the means of a-priori defined criteria) as well as the according integration of

¹ The project is also supported by the Austrian Labour Market Agency (AMS, <http://www.ams.at>) and the Austrian Ministry of Economy and Labour (BMWA, www.bmwa.gv.at).

experiences into the planning and realisation of future measures. In detail, seven fields of quality (“quality domains”) will be worked on in a context oriented way:

1. Analysis of demand and need, goals of vocational orientation and activation measures
2. Tendering Guidelines and Training Design
3. Personnel policy, quality and qualification required of trainers
4. Course materials and infrastructure
5. General quality assurance measures that involve different actors on system level
6. General quality assurance measures before and after the measure
7. Feedback and Evaluation

2 Hitherto Results of the Project

During the compilation of the comparing synthesis-report (see www.quinora.com) existing quality standards, guidelines and programs were identified. A first analysis resulted in the (little surprising) big heterogeneity in the situations for job-seekers in vocational orientation in the participating countries. Next to group counselling, that is primarily employed in Austria; single counselling is the prevalent method of vocational orientation. Both methods are offered by private as well as public institutions. Also the situation concerning quality assurance is largely diverse in the participating countries. In Germany, Great Britain, Sweden and Switzerland highly elaborated quality assurance and standardisation concepts are already in place whereas they are still very small in other countries.

Many of the participating countries already demand formal qualifications of consultants and trainers, the majority also demands professional experience outside the field of vocational orientation as well as social and personal competences. In many cases more or less detailed systems of quality certification already exist in the countries that are demanding formal qualifications of trainers and consultants.

3 Existing Deficits in Quality Development

Existing quality standards apply either to the management level (on the level of the institution) or on the service level respectively on the service providers (trainers) themselves. The complete system of vocational orientation/counselling that does include various actors and whose interaction and perception of quality equally influence measure quality is focused on only seldom.

So far the focus has rather been on individual parts of the quality system such as competences and abilities of vocational trainers/counsellors, the processing by service/educational institutions or detailed requirements for tendering by labour market actors (National labour market agencies, AMS,). What so far escaped attention but is equally important for the quality of a measure as the trainer's competences, is the interaction of the relevant actors involved.

That's why, next to motivation, qualification and competences of trainers, the interaction of the actors in planning and realisation but also in post-processing (analysis of feedback, control of success by the means of a-priori defined criteria) as well as the according integration of experiences into the planning and realisation of future or follow-up measures is decisive for total process quality.

4 Guidelines for Quality Development in Vocational and Activation Trainings

Building on this analysis of the current situation, international quality guidelines for vocational orientation and activation trainings that are specifically focussing on the management- and system level of the labour market actors have been developed in the course of two QUINORA project meetings. In the following the essential aspects of the identified quality domains that will be worked on intensively by QUINORA will be characterised:

Quality domain 1: Analysis of Demand and Needs

An analysis of demand and needs should be interpreted as a basis for the conception and realisation of vocational orientation and activation measures. Demand analyses are based on a comprehensive monitoring of current and continuous changes in the labour market. Local, regional and global developments,

dependencies and cross-interactions have to be included in the monitoring. It can be assumed that only a goal-focussed examination of the labour market conditions can result in qualitative well conceptualised measures. Only through an integration of current labour market conditions it will be possible to realise also ethically sound measures for participants.

Next to the focus on labour market demand and the condition of the labour market also the expected – frequently heterogeneous – needs of the participants have to be integrated into measure conception. The diversity of Participants has to be identified in time and the deducted needs and interests have to be integrated accordingly into conception. The definition of content, goals and target group is a result of demand and needs analyses. As a rule the superordinated measure goal will serve as a guiding principle. Integrating participants into the labour market and further qualification are usually the focus of labour market measures in order to prevent long-term unemployment. Next to a variety of specific contents, relevant basis content should be included in any case to achieve that goal. The teaching of career- and life-management-skills should be included.

Quality domain 2: Tendering Guidelines and Training Design

Following the relevant laws and regulations of public tendering public contracting bodies issue detailed and mandatory catalogues of quality criteria. Tendering guidelines create a structure for the content wise presentation of measures.

Tendering guidelines are a mandatory basis for the structured evaluation of presented concepts and for the awarding of contracts. Clearly structured tendering criteria also constitute the basis for monitoring and final evaluation of measures. Insofar tendering criteria have a steering function for the whole measure process. The development of criteria and guidelines for planning, realisation and evaluation of training measures is a quality assuring process in vocational orientation and activation measures. To evaluate the feasibility of the formulated criteria – operationalized in a specific training design – in the presented offers, contracting parties have to make sure that there is a universal understanding of quality and goals in the conception- and planning team, the executing party (Trainers) as well as in the evaluating commission.

Quality domain 3: Personnel Policy, Quality and Qualification Required of Trainers

This quality domain focuses on one of the most essential aspects in the context of labour market measures. The quality of training measures is also depending on qualifications and competences of trainers. The qualification of trainers is defined by their formal education as well as their informally acquired competences. It is the task of training institutions to systematically and in a structured way define and continuously develop personnel related quality standards and criteria. That's a difficult task: There is e.g. no definitive standardized formation for trainers in vocational orientation and activation fields. Trainers dispose over heterogeneous formal educational backgrounds, are usually employed part-time, with different employment contracts and frequently also with more than one training institution.

Employments are discontinuous, payment is little in relation to effort and the amount of work including preparation and post-processing is hardly ever paid for. Continuous and expert further education is not offered institutionally. Identification with the goals and expectations of training institutions and commissioning agencies is hard to establish. In their staff policy training institutions also have to account for sufficient administrative and commercial personnel. Administrative and organisational issues should not be placed in the responsibility of the trainers. Already during conception and planning, training institutions have to provide a conclusive personnel concept. It is therefore the responsibility of commissioning agencies to check on the personnel situation – according to the measure description – and if necessary formulate in time clear requirements e.g. regarding qualifications and competences.

Quality domain 4: Course Materials and Infrastructure

Course materials have to be matched with course goals and target group; Something that is regarded as self-evident but often poses difficult challenges: Participants of measures are often very heterogeneous concerning their educational and professional background. For the compilation of course materials all necessary information regarding goals and target group of the measure has to be known. It is essential to know about the level of language command (including literacy, reading skills and others) before preparing intricate texts. Language should be clear and free of expert or foreign termini and stereotypes.

While in “free adult education” participants (= paying customers) often decide about enrolment with a certain institution based on the infrastructure available. Participants of labour market related courses are usually deprived of this information; Participation is more or less compulsory and linked to the receipt of financial subsidies.

Especially the massive effect, infrastructure can have on participant’s motivation and also to their learning orientation, should not be ignored.

In any case the training institution has to be able to provide the infrastructure according to current health and safety standards and regulations. Concerning technical equipment (e.g. ICT) it should be warranted that equipment is fulfilling current standards and exigencies. It has to be guaranteed that trainers are up-to-date with developments as well. It has to be made sure that participants are prepared for integration into the regular labour market by the provision of all necessary up-to-date learning-settings.

Quality domain 5: Quality Assurance on System Level

Quality assurance is a challenge that concerns a whole institution and is reflected in every part of it. On a system level training institutions have (or should have) quality management (QM) and quality assurance (QA) systems. Normally these are certifications from the norms ISO, EQFM, TQM or quality models that were developed specifically for the field of further education as e.g. CERTQUA, LQW, eduQua or similar. The sole existence of such QM-systems is not a guarantee that the realised measures are of high quality. QM-systems are often implemented with high effort and costs but do not by themselves create an institution-wide perception of quality nor guarantee an increase in measure quality. Institutions frequently dispose of own libraries of QM-process documentation but in many cases these documents don’t receive (sufficient) further attention and are not lived in everyday work. Implemented QM-systems should be able to communicate an institution-wide – which means involving all people taking part in the process – understanding of quality. It should be clear for everybody involved what the institution’s concept of quality is, what criteria are relevant in the realisation of this common understanding, what processes have been defined to realise it and how that understanding is being continuously developed.

QM and QA systems imply two aspects: On one side it's about controlling the institutions quality and on the other it's about further development of quality. It has to be called for QM and QA-systems being an integral part of institutions' strategy and that all parts of the organisation are concerned and involved. The same basic understanding of quality by all persons involved has to be provided during all relevant phases of the process.

Quality domain 6: Quality Assurance during the Course

To sum it up, quality of a measure is defined by the conception of the right measure for the right target group under provision of the adequate and right resources and infrastructure as well as the knowledge transfer of the right content by qualified and competent personnel. Both the commissioner and the contractor are responsible for that. Both parties have to bear equal responsibility that quality – that is usually defined by conception and exigencies – can be realised. E.g. the assigning actor has to dispose over all relevant information about the course to adequately prepare future participants. The contractor on the other side has to provide trainers with all the relevant (background) information so that they can inquire and question it if necessary.

Quality domain 7: Feedback and Evaluation

Criteria and connecting factor for evaluation and feedback are more or less fixed in the process of the quality cycle (Planning – realisation – analysis and reflection of the measure). It is the responsibility of training institutions to provide clear regulations for feedback-systems for trainers and participants. Feedback and reflection of and about done work respectively participation in a measure have to be institutionalised.

Moreover every training institution is well advised to have its services continuously evaluated internally and externally. Internal evaluation has the goal to portray strengths and weaknesses of a measure in a report that can later on also be used as a basis for external evaluation. External evaluations are conducted by external experts. The goal of an external evaluation is to identify strategies for quality improvement in the concerned area with the aid of experts. As a rule external evaluation is planning for the realisation of suggestions for improvement and

general feedback in the course of follow-up action. External experts should be free in their competences and free to act as they deem necessary. Insofar the selection and deployment of these experts is a crucial process. Experts should dispose of various competences (e.g. knowledge of evaluation and basic scientific research, labour market related know-how and training competences). On basis of their expertise recommendations should be given and decisions made.

5 Further Progression of the Project

Based on these formulated quality domains and sub-aspects an e-learning-tool, that will help organisations implement those quality standards step-by-step, will be developed till the end of 2006. The e-learning-tool contains a theoretical part, its core is a collection of best practices though, that will give insight into the practical quality development processes of the participating countries. An e-library will provide additional information about quality in vocational orientation. The first test-run of these tools will be done in the course of a workshop-series for labour market actors, team leaders or training managers of the training institutions themselves. These workshops will start in winter 2006/2007 and will also be evaluated. The four workshops serve as a basis for the exchange of experiences and discussion and also have the goal of producing a joint product (e.g. summary of the discussion processes and results, characterising possibilities for change of the system and/or the organisation) which will also be disseminated publicly.

