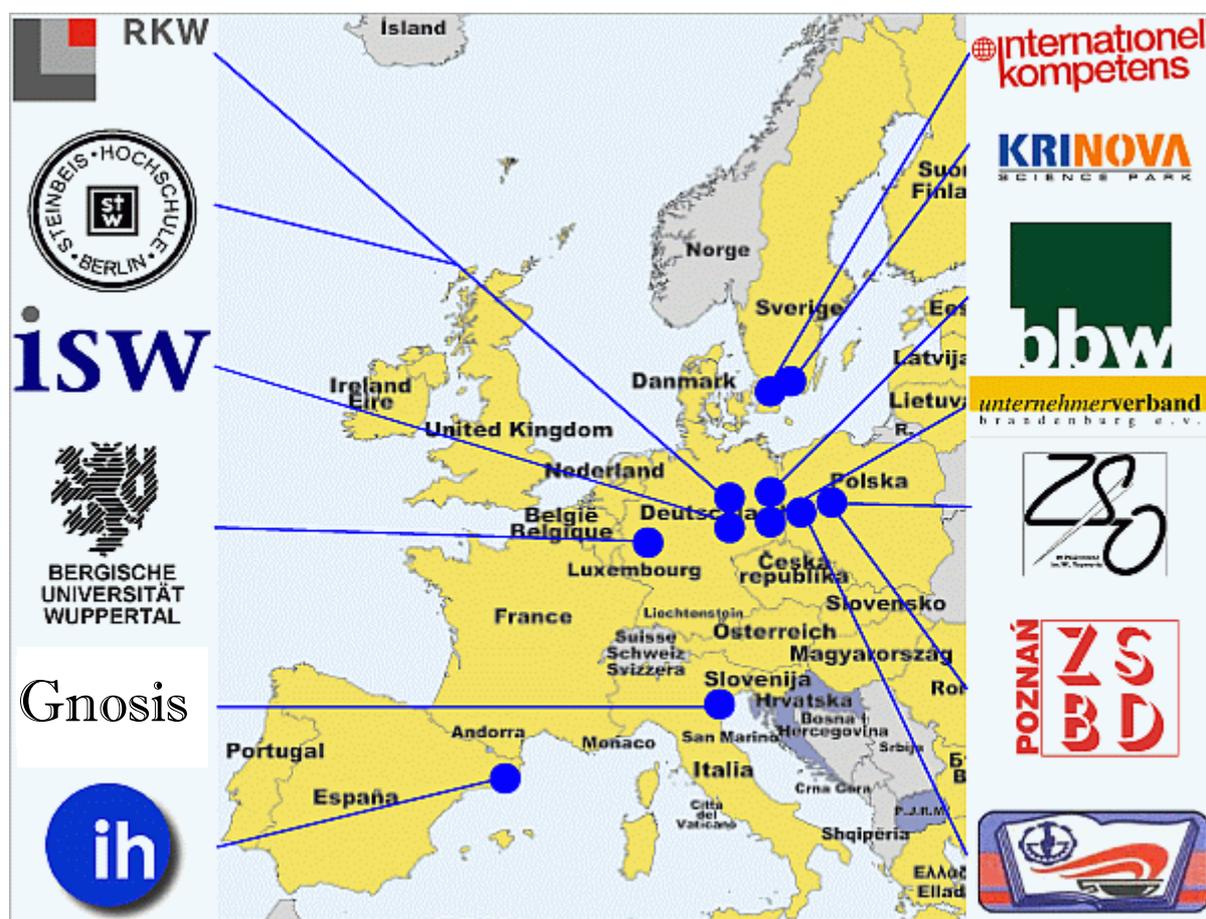


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Quality Assurance for transnational educational services

The project and its partner

Transnational quality is the title of a LEONARDO DA VINCI pilot project which has been brought together 13 partners from 5 countries from 2007 to 2009, to work on the theme of quality management for educational service providers. Educational organisations, scientific institutions and consulting firms from Italy, Poland, Sweden, Spain and Germany worked together to compile quality guidelines for international co-operation of educational service providers as well as further instruments of quality management. Due to the wide ranging participation of various agents from Europe, products with international know-how appeared which can be used throughout Europe. Knowledge and experience from the project have already found their way into the work of various institutions and into the existing ISO norms for suppliers of non formal educational services.



Quality requirements of the market

In recent years the market character of vocational training has become increasingly manifest, as can be seen from the **change in the market for basic and advanced**

vocational training from a provider's to a buyer's market. With the transition from supply-side to demand-side orientation the competition of education providers among themselves intensifies. Whereas in the past regional stakeholders in the advanced training sector – in association with the relevant employment agency and local companies – used to determine the extent and nature of the qualifications on offer, there is now an increasingly wide array of offers from all sorts of providers. The price/ performance ratios of these offers often vary considerably. This forces potential users to spend more time weighing up the relative merits of the education offers. At the same time the continuous expansion of the further education market makes it impossible for anyone to take it in at a glance. This makes it more and more necessary to provide interested parties with reliable criteria that will enable them to assess – as with the purchase of any other commodity on the market – the quality and benefits of the courses. This also increases the responsibility of the potential consumer for choosing the right course. But he can only perform his role of sovereign decision-maker if he is sufficiently qualified to do so. This makes it necessary to provide him with the criteria he needs to make his decision together with information about “good practice” in advanced vocational training and examples thereof.

This changed market conditions make clear how much the **importance of quality measurement and assessment as a decision-making aid** for planning and implementation of advanced vocational training courses by demanders and providers is increasing in the current climate of change. Proper account can only be taken of the resultant requirements if a definite system of quality management is in place.

A system of quality management that makes it possible to evaluate and compare the courses on offer on the basis of transparent and binding criteria will greatly facilitate the search for a course leading to the required qualifications. At the same time systematic quality management makes it easier for educational organizations themselves to meet the increasingly sudden changes in qualification needs with a constant flow of new offers without having to put up with drastic fluctuations or setbacks as regards the value of the results or customer satisfaction.

Quality assurance is increasingly becoming a navigation system which enables educational organisations to reconcile the requirements of users and customers. Professional education and advanced training requires this qualitative navigation system both for the content, methodical, and organisational control of the educational services as well as the reliable self monitoring and management of the educational service providers.

Quality requirements of transnational cooperation

Educational organizations are increasingly faced with the **challenge of internationalization**. This is due to many causes, of which I would like to stress at least the following:

- Exchanges between the EU member countries are intensifying, flanked by the processes of globalization. This gives rise to increasing mobility among those to whom basic and advanced training offers are addressed. Students and job-seekers routinely cross international borders. This makes the problem of the international comparability and recognition of the qualifications awarded and services provided by educational organizations all the more urgent.

- The pressure of competition in one's own "traditional" market (both from domestic and increasingly from foreign providers) is rising. This increases the pressure on educational organizations to mobilize themselves and open up new markets, if necessary abroad.
- These factors, combined with the basic features of the transition to a knowledge society, enhance the need for coordination and cooperation in the sector of basic and advanced vocational training beyond the national framework.

Internationalization thus initially appears as a form of compulsion, the result of events and developments which we are powerless to prevent. But it also offers those who actively confront those problems great opportunities for gaining competitive edge.

These opportunities are created specifically by

- the emergence of new target groups
- improvements in educational know-how, and
- the more rational provision of services based on the use of synergies arising out of transnational cooperation, division of labour, and exchanges.

However, if educational organizations are to exploit the opportunities of internationalization effectively, they will have to take account of the need for change, as exemplified by such processes as the transition to "New Learning" and the transformation we are witnessing of the market for basic and advanced vocational training from a provider's to a buyer's market.

The European quality dimension of the work and education market also requires cross national practice standards for quality development of the educational providers, in correlation to the Joint Framework of Quality Assurance (CQAF) and the future European Reference Framework for Quality Assurance (EQARF). This requires a clarity and comparability of the European and national instruments and systems of quality assurance in professional education and advanced training and to other European quality standards, which promote the cross border co-operation of education providers.

The work in our LEONARDO DA VINCI project was targeted at exactly these requirements. Therefore, we turned towards areas of quality assurance which until now had not been given due attention in the quality assurance systems – cross national educational co-operation and educational export. Fields which are not just important for the European Union, but also increasingly play a role worldwide. So, the World Trade Organisation is insistently trying to raise awareness of the requirements of a standardisation and increased clarity in international trade with educational services in the scope the GATS round¹.

While in previous years quality requirements for companies and suppliers of training services arose in great number and diversity, there are until now no quality standards or guidelines for the area of international training co-operation. The QUALITY GUIDELINES are dedicated to this deficit. They expand quality management systems of training institutions by requirements for a quality oriented design of transnational relationships.

¹ General Agreement on Trade in Services

Goals of the QUALITY GUIDELINES

The QUALITY GUIDELINES are orientated towards competence development in the knowledge based society. They aim to promote quality assurance (models, providers, participants/customers) on different levels (results, processes and structural quality). They offer the opportunity to create a consensus between significant content criteria, requirements/indicators, implementations and certifications.

The QUALITY GUIDELINES encompass both the quality of educational offers and the success of the educational service providers, the success of their company goals and strategies, the assurance and increase of effectiveness and economic viability.

The QUALITY GUIDELINES are intended to answer the question as to **what** has to be regulated in the training sites to ensure the success of such an internationalization project (transnational engagement) on the part of the educational organization.

They also answer the question of **how** the necessary processes and resources are to be constituted and **the way in which** they are to be applied. For this reason the Quality Guidelines also contain the requisite criteria for quality assurance in international educational cooperation.

Die QUALITY GUIDELINES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are aimed at improving the learning-oriented framework for international educational cooperation and creating a solid basis for mutual trust, thus contributing to the merging of the European education systems; • are intended to ensure that a proper balance is found between the legitimate interests of the parties involved in transnational educational cooperation; • supplement the QM STAGE MODEL to provide a frame of reference for the Quality Assurance and evaluation of transnational education projects, cooperation arrangements, and qualifications/certificates; • make a contribution to “consumer protection” for learners, employers and other stakeholders by promoting the transparency and binding nature of learning offers as well as the recognition of skills and qualifications; and • promote transnational cooperation in vocational education by helping to remove obstacles to vocational and geographical mobility and opening access to life-long learning.

The **aim** is the creation and use of jointly agreed guidelines acceptable to all parties.

Their development and implementation must therefore take account of such principles as:

- Acting to one another's mutual advantage
- Equality of partners
- Mutual respect for the independence and sovereignty of the parties
- Taking into account the interests and potential of all parties

- A balanced distribution of advantages and obligations among the parties
- The generation of synergies by exploiting mutually reinforcing factors
- Facilitating new forms of cooperation that go beyond traditional cooperation and the exchange of learners
- Making due allowance for differences between educational systems and economic frameworks
- Respect for human rights and basic freedoms; and
- Understanding and respect for all nations and tolerance of other cultures, civilizations and life-styles.

Application area

The QUALITY GUIDELINES are mainly addressed to market-economy oriented institutions in the private sector and those in the public sector whose education offers compete with those of other institutions. The use of the QUALITY GUIDELINES by other educational institutions is also desirable, though it may require some adjustments.

Transnational education processes as understood in the QUALITY GUIDELINES are the management, support and value-added processes involved in providing the following transnational education services:²

- export of education as a cross-border service (e-learning, virtual education offers, media, courses, and training materials);
- education services offered to residents of other countries (target-group-specific courses for foreigners, study trips, language training, partly combined with tourism);
- education services offered abroad using teachers from the despatching country or local staff (education offers from subsidiaries or foreign branches; non-formal higher education; distance education & training; blended learning; training courses; coaching; workshops; specialized seminars; and private tutors);
- international educational cooperation abroad (cooperation in the country of the cooperation partner or in other target countries, joint ventures, franchises); and
- international cross-border educational cooperation (cooperation on the development of education products and use of resources e.g. cross-border Group training, cooperation agreements, twinning).

Tying in with existing quality management systems

In the first step the project compared various quality approaches (framework conditions, procedures, standards) with European partners and discussed in the light of the Joint European Quality Assurance Framework. Meanwhile, more and more countries are orientating the supervision and evaluation of their own systems to the European specifications. Quality assurance is seen as a key to success.

² This breakdown is essentially based on the list of international education services used by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The partners in the project agreed that they did not want to make any further quality management systems to the existing ones in the development of quality guidelines for international co-operation. Therefore they decided on the QM STAGE MODEL as an initial, which conformed to CQAF and had been proved in practice.³

At the national level the QM STAGE MODEL is in conformity with the described market requirements. That may be seen from the following characteristics of this reference model for quality management in vocational training:

- The system's process-orientation based on EN ISO 9000ff:2000 and EFQM, giving more precise form to and developing further the requirements of these reference systems in the interests of the transparency and comparability of services provided
- The allowance made by the model for the specific nature of advanced vocational training as a person-related service
- Its taking account of the pedagogical dimension of the service provision in the field of advanced vocational training.
- Its openness to integration with other certification systems
- Its graduated requirements, making it possible to react to the different conditions in educational organizations for introducing a QM system
- The way it facilitates continuous quality development
- Its dual use as
 - systematic instructions for introducing a quality development system, and
 - a self-assessment tool.

However, the QM STAGE MODEL in its present form is not suitable for quality management in the context of transnational activities by educational organizations.

For this we need QUALITY GUIDELINES jointly developed and agreed with the European partners, since quality standards for transnational education activities are not obtained by simply transposing the organization's existing quality requirements and standards to the international level. They have to be expanded to include a whole new dimension. The abilities, skills and authorizations required for providing good-quality service at national level must be joined by specific competences for transnational activities. These are essentially intercultural competences and a knowledge of the administrative conditions and requirements in the host countries and the EU (especially knowledge of procedures), as well as the ability to conduct international project management.

³ The QM STUFEN-MODELL[®] is the result of model projects which were promoted by the German States of Berlin and Brandenburg and the European Union. A consortium of 100 educational companies, institutions and experts were included in the compilation under the management of the RKW Berlin-Brandenburg. The development occurred in co-operation with the DIN Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V. (German Institute for Standardisation). The result was published in PAS 1037 in April 2004. In 2007 the QM STUFEN-MODELL[®] was drawn upon as an initial draft for the development of an ISO standard for quality management of providers of non formal educational services.

Therefore, the QUALITY GUIDELINES supplement an existing quality management system for the requirements of international co-operation of educational establishments in professional education. This coupling is also possible for other QM systems in the education sector and project partners will strive towards this in the future. The users of professional education will be provided with a European orientated QM system. Interested parties can integrate the QUALITY GUIDELINES directly into their quality assurance systems. For this purpose there are comparative keys e.g. for ISO 9001 and for AZWV [German Decree on Approval and Admission in Advanced Training]. With this approach regional and sectoral quality standards will be extended and educational sector specific quality management will be improved.

Design of QUALITY GUIDELINES

Because the guidelines are intended only to supplement existing quality management systems, they only contain information which relates to the transnational aspect of quality management.

This concerns especially the already specified principles of cooperation, the scope and the forms of transnational educational services as well as information on the nature of the following intercultural competences:

- Basic understanding of one's own and the alien culture
- Communication and acting in intercultural situations
- Intercultural negotiating and conflicts

The guidelines themselves are very tersely formulated and limited to essentials. Detailed explanatory notes are provided in form of a compendium.

the corresponding specifications of the quality management system and also the structure, the individual regulations were allocated to the requirements of the QM STUFEN-MODELLS® (QM stage model). The QM STUFEN-MODELL® is based upon a quality cycle just like the CQAF, which provides the suitable links between planning, implementation, evaluation and checking professional education. The same approach is also followed by EQARF. In accordance with this structure the requirements of the QUALITY GUIDELINES are divided into four chapters.

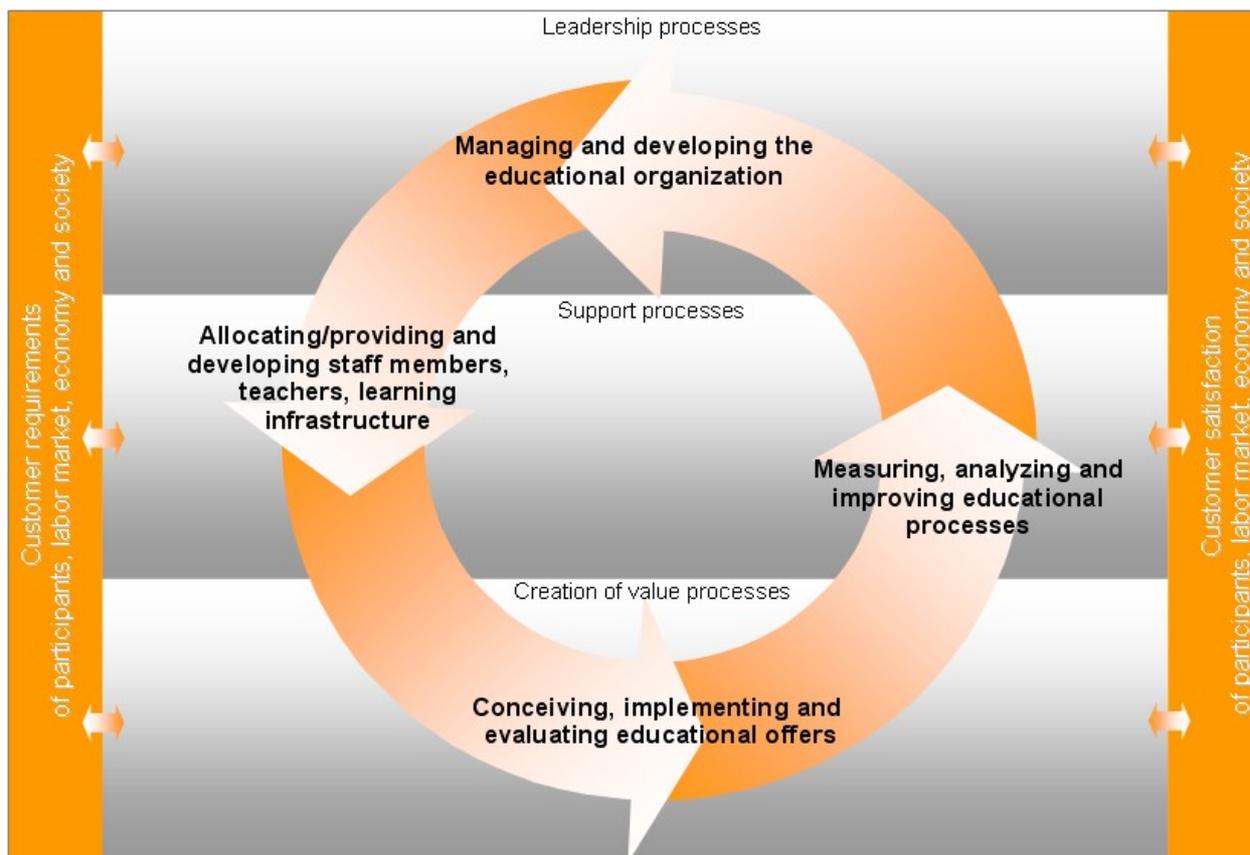


Fig.: Model of a process-oriented Quality Management System complying with the QM STAGE MODEL

The QUALITY GUIDELINES take account of the following principles:

With regard to the role of the Quality Guidelines:

- The Quality Guidelines contribute to the transparency of the education offer.
- They create confidence and promote the compatibility of the qualification offers.
- The possibility of combining education offers to meet the specific requirements of companies is facilitated by the cooperation between education providers.

The laying down of the Quality Guidelines

- reflects on the one hand the general and specific aims of the qualification, and
- acts on the other hand as a guide on how to achieve these aims (by indicating where to place the emphasis).

From the point of view of the transnational activities of educational organizations the Quality Guidelines define important minimum requirements which we think an effective system of quality assessment and quality management must meet. These include the following criteria:

- Up-to-dateness of offers
- Customer satisfaction (the offers must meet the needs of the companies and must ultimately be judged by the degree to which they succeed in this.)
- Minimum qualifications of lecturers and trainers

- Quality of the organization of the education processes
- Appropriateness of place, time and cost of the qualification
- Advance selection of participants on the basis of verifiable admission standards
- Minimum quality of the courses and curricula as well as of the teaching and learning material
- Ensuring practical relevance
- Holistic nature of the advanced training (beyond the mere conveying of specialized knowledge)
- Holding of examinations (especially final examinations)
- Transfer monitoring when the results of advanced training are used in the companies.

Project work in the services of quality

The QUALITY GUIDELINES arose for and with educational organisations, which put themselves out for international educational co-operation. These development works were flanked and enabled by forming networks, bodies of experts and testing until implementation in usable procedures. At the beginning of 2009 the first version of the QUALITY GUIDELINES was published. At the beginning of 2008 the educational establishments involved in the project tried out these guidelines. Furthermore, they were discussed in a multitude of workshops and other events with a broad range of interested parties. This included representatives from working bodies of the Nordic council, the region of Venice and from various Polish voivodships. The results of the project were also introduced at several conferences of the Federal Institute for Professional Education and its partner institution in Vienna. An improved circulation was fed by all these discussions and collected experiences at the beginning of 2009. The revision of the QUALITY GUIDELINES in 2008 furthermore took into account the quality criteria, which are descriptions to be understood as benchmarks and reference indicators on the level of the educational provider, as the recommendations to set up an EQARF suggest.

Implementation assistance was compiled for the QUALITY GUIDELINES and published in a compendium. In this compendium, pointers to typical problems and recommendations for quality development and assurance were deduced from scientific knowledge and practical experience in international educational cooperation. It contains a range of methods and tools from management practice as well as useful aids for a systematic and target oriented approach. A comprehensive table with further information and additions to the requirements and guidelines constitutes the core of this compendium.

<p>QM STAGE-MODEL is a certifiable quality management system for educational establishments (DIN PAS 1037)</p>	<p>QUALITY GUIDELINES are requirements on the quality orientated design of transnational education</p>
<p>COMPETENCE CENTRE is a communication platform with information and applications e.g. a competence tool</p>	<p>QM Manual is a reference document for quality management systems of transnationally orientated educational establishments</p>

The QUALITY GUIDELINES and the compendium are available in German, English, Polish, Italian, Spanish and Catalan (www.leonardo-tqp.eu). The authors are convinced that further improvements, instruments and languages will be added in the coming years. It is already planned to prepare the QUALITY GUIDELINES for the new ISO-standard in the area of advanced training, which the authors of the QUALITY GUIDELINES are also contributing to. This leads to a dual transnationality—on the one hand due to the guidelines and on the other hand due to clear transnational standards for market orientated training service providers.

On the whole, the partners dealt with this quality theme very productively. A positive accompanying result is that two Polish partner institutions from the education sector could be certified according to the QM STUFEN-MODELL. In the region of Venice the transfer of the requirements developed in the project to the model for accreditation of educational service providers is being checked. A further product is an exemplary QM handbook, which the bbw Bildungswerk [Vocational Training Unit for Economy in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany] compiled for its German – Polish youth factory. The handbook includes the QUALITY GUIDELINES in the requirements.

As the competence centre for the project a web based platform for project communication at www.leonardo-tqp.eu exists. Here the partners describe their project experiences at regular intervals and the work results are shown. Various tools for quality management will be made available to the partners. This includes a Competence Assessment Tool (CAT), for which ideas have been developed of how you can comprehend the competence of teachers and derive personal and organisational development steps from this. Part of the platform is publicly accessible. The QUALITY GUIDELINES and the compendium are available to download. The QUALITY GUIDELINES are available in German and English in the “impuls” series of the National Agency of Education for Europe at BiBB.

The QUALITY GUIDELINES live on the dedication of everyone involved in transnational training services. These guidelines on quality improvement have been developed especially for them. Quality management, and this in particular in a heterogeneous and often dynamically changing international environment, requires both a learning organisation with a critical self-reflection and an active participation of interest partners in the change processes.