

# **GuideMe! Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Guidance Measures for Job-Seekers on the System Level**

Project Management: Karin Steiner

Authors: Maria E. Weber, Karin  
Steiner, Ruth Kasper

Project:



[www.guideme.at](http://www.guideme.at)

Date: June 2010

## 1 GuideMe! – an Overview

The project GuideMe! is an innovation transfer project within the framework of the "Leonardo da Vinci Project", supported by the European Union. The aim is to extend the already developed quality guidelines and a curriculum to **improve the quality of guidance measures in the context of the previous project QUINORA** to "new" countries. Thus a foundation for common EU quality criteria in guidance was created already within the scope of the project QUINORA and will be now transferred to more regions of Bulgaria and Austria (already QUINORA partners) and to new partner countries: Greece, Lithuania, Turkey and Poland.

In response to the internationalisation for guidance of job seekers European quality standards and the European perspective of the predecessor project QUINORA will be further established. The project QUINORA (2005 – 2007, [www.quinora.com](http://www.quinora.com)) includes a curriculum with seven quality domains and a total number of 22 modules, complemented with 48 best practices applicable throughout Europe. GuideMe! will be transferred to the new partner countries with further translated materials into the new languages, and 16 additional country-specific best practices. Moreover, the GuideMe! platform will consist of an e-learning platform consisting of literature, weblinks and downloads on the topics quality and guidance provided by all participating countries.

In each country the curriculum will be discussed within four 2-day lasting workshops with **managers of guidance training** activities in training institutions, various **labour and education policy-makers** (e.g. employment agencies in EU countries), **engaged in guidance activities**, as well as **trainers of guidance measures**.

The following paper describes the basis of both projects, QUINORA and GuideMe!, namely the international guidelines for vocational orientation and activation in group settings. Those guidelines could also deliver an interesting (discussion) input for labour market related qualification measures or in further adult education measures.

All this will not be done – as is the custom – focussing exclusively on trainers' 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 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. Staff 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 Quality Situation in the QUINORA and Guide me! partner countries**

During the compilation of the comparing synthesis report (see [www.quinora.com](http://www.quinora.com)) which was now also supplemented by a comparison of the quality in the new partner countries (see [www.guideme.at](http://www.guideme.at)) existing quality standards, guidelines and programs were identified. A first analysis showed that the situations for job-seekers in vocational orientation in the participating countries are very heterogeneous. Next to group counselling that is primarily employed in Austria; single counselling is the prevalent method of vocational orientation in the Guide me! partner countries. Both methods are offered by private and public institutions. The situation concerning quality assurance is also very diverse in the participating countries. In the QUINORA partner countries Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, and Switzerland highly elaborated quality assurance and standardisation concepts are already in place. In the Guide Me! partner countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland, Greece, Lithuania) there a big differences concerning the implementation of quality management and assurance strategies in guidance, also concerning trainers' qualifications. Today, most of the participating countries already established compulsive formal qualifications of counsellors/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. In some countries as in Poland and Lithuania quality standards in guidance were recently established on a legal basis. Greece also established quality standards which are already applied in the vocational training sector but not in guidance measures. In Austria different quality standards exist, as several vocational counselling institutions developed their own quality standards, but consistent quality standards have not been established yet. This is also true for Turkey where the Vocational Qualification Authority is currently establishing quality standards for both vocational training and guidance. Although the quality situation in the partner countries is very heterogeneous, some similarities could be identified: First, the national public employment services in the partner countries play a very important role as initiators and providers of guidance measures. They provide guidance directly in their local and regional centres and offices, moreover, they put measures (especially training measures) out to tender. Second, more and more universities offer study programs specialized in vocational counselling (and training) at graduate (Lithuania, Greece, and Turkey) or postgraduate level (Poland). Third, cooperation and communication between different guidance organizers and providers is often difficult and insufficient, this is also true for the communication between guidance initiators and implementing institutions (and implementing institutions and trainers). Fourth, regular (intern as well as extern) evaluation is not or insufficiently carried out in several partner countries. Finally, the (continuous) adaption of guidance markets to the trends on and the needs of the national labor markets is still an important challenge in most partner countries.

### **3 Existing Deficits in Quality Development**

Existing quality standards apply either to the management level (in guidance providers) or to trainers themselves. Though quality standards apply very seldom on the whole system (including all different stakeholders and actors) of vocational orientation/counselling. So far the focus has rather been on individual parts of the quality system such as competences and abilities of vocational trainers/counsellors, on the activities of service/educational institutions or on detailed requirements for call for tenders that put guidance measures out for tender (like national labour market agencies, Public Employment Services). 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 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**

Based 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 Guide Me! will be described:

##### *Quality domain 1: Analysis of Demand and Needs*

The demand and needs analysis form the 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 on 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 an integration of current labour market conditions will make the establishment of ethically sound measures for participants possible.

Additionally to the labour market demand and the conditions of the labour market, the - often heterogeneous - needs of the participants have to be integrated into a measure's 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 general rule the superordinate measure goal will serve as a guiding principle. The main focus usually lies on the integration of the participants into the labour market and on providing further qualification in order to prevent long-term unemployment. Next to a variety of specific subjects, basic content should be included in any case. Moreover, 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 define detailed and mandatory quality criteria. Guidelines for tenders create a basis for the content wise presentation of measures.

Guidelines for tenders 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 implementation of the formulated criteria – implemented in a specific training design – in the presented offers, contracting parties have to assure 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 of labour market measures. The quality of training measures depends a lot on qualifications and competences of trainers. Trainers' qualifications are defined by formal education as well as informally acquired competences. It is the task of training institutions to systematically define and continuously develop personnel related quality standards and criteria. That's a difficult task: There is 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's 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 the 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 given. 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 their enrolment on the basis of the available infrastructure and services, 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.

As infrastructure can have an impact on the participants' motivation and also to their learning orientation, it should be given sufficient attention.

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. At the 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<sup>1</sup> or quality models that were developed specifically for the field of further education as 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 understanding of quality which means involving all people taking part in the process. 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 the one hand it's about controlling the institutions quality and on the other hand it's about further development of quality. QM and QA-systems need to become an integral part of institutions' strategies. The same basic understanding of quality by all persons involved has to be assured 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 and give them the possibility to inquire more detailed information 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 on feedback-systems for trainers and participants. Feedback and reflection of done work respectively participation in a measure have to be institutionalised.

Moreover every training institution should 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 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

---

<sup>1</sup> TQM (Total Quality Management) was originally developed in the USA in the 1940ies and aims to establish quality and quality control as the principal system objective of an organization/ company.

know-how and training competences). On the basis of their expertise and the evaluation outcomes recommendations can be given and decisions made.

## 5 Further Progression of the Project

Based on these formulated quality domains an e-learning-tool was developed within QUINORA. The tool contains a collection of best practices and helps organisations implementing the quality standards step-by-step. It also gives insight into the practical quality development processes of the participating countries of QUINORA. The e-library provides additional information about quality in vocational orientation. Both the e-learning tool and the e-library were tested within several workshops for labour market actors, team leaders, or training managers of the training institutions themselves (which were also evaluated). The four workshops permitted the exchange of experiences and discussion. During the evaluation, numerous workshop participants and stake-holders gave positive feedback. Therefore, the QUINORA curriculum should be transferred to other regions and countries what is now the main goal of Guide me. Guide me! will also set the basis for a common EU quality criteria system in guidance in group settings by directly addressing the level of guidance practitioners and involving their experience.

The partners will first present some new best practices developed in their country which become part of the new e-library, together with ten old best practices which are all translated into the new partners' languages (available on the project's website [www.guideme.at](http://www.guideme.at) and on a CD-ROM which will be produced). The exercise and theory modules developed within QUINORA will also be available on the website. Through four 2-day workshops taking place in different regions in every partner country, the new materials will be discussed and valorised among the target group (managers of guidance and training institutions, various labor and education policy-makers like employment agencies as well as trainers of guidance measures). Finally, the valorization and dissemination activities as well as the cooperation between the project partners will be evaluated.

