



Internationella PROGRAMKONTORET



GD Utbildning och kultur

Programmet för livslångt lärande

A new European approach toward Quality Assurance in Vocational Education

“I have been a teacher myself for over 15 years now. To keep developing myself as a teacher in my profession I signed in for a Masters programme. When I started my masters course I expected a lot from the way the institute would arrange the course and the methodologies that would be used. There has been a lot of development in the didactical approaches since I have got my certificate and started as a teacher. Much to my surprise the subject matters of tuition were presented most of the time in the same traditional way: in blocks of two hours colleges with long monologues of the experts. There was few room for discussion or other ways to deal with the information presented. If I had known this in advance I would have selected a different institute. Because I think apart from being challenging learning can be also fun and inspiring.”

Quality Frameworks

There are many reasons to handle the issue of quality of service of your institute with careful attention. One of the most important and most often mentioned arguments is paying attention to the needs of you own customers: the students. Many people tend to forget the impact one dissatisfied customer has on ones business. Especially for organizations that offer professional education it is important to communicate with its customers about what the institute offers and how the institute offers it: not only communicating with the students, but also with other relevant stakeholders or customers like the parents, employer organisation and government etc. Since what we perceive as quality today might easily change already tomorrow. In this way quality is closely linked to the capacity of an educational organisation to keep on communicating with its stakeholders on what the institute does and how it is done, and to assure that all agree in this. As a help to achieve and guarantee this form of mutual effective communication different quality frameworks are in use like ISO, EFQM, Balanced Score Card, INK or Baldrige Award for Educational Excellence. In general a quality framework consists of all activities that are required to investigate the quality of professional education, to guarantee this quality or improve on it and make it public.

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Quality at a European level

At a national level for professional education quality assurance is not an easy task. But at European level things are getting even more complicated. The organizations not only need to comply to the what they agreed to be good quality in dialogue with their customers in a regional context. They also need to comply to rules, regulations and requirements that are defined by the national authority for assuring quality. And since this is still different between many of the European countries quality assurance between European countries is hard to arrange for. This has some serious consequences: the market of professional education at European level is not very transparent. This has a negative effect on the mobility of workers within the European Union and on the promotion of Life Long Learning.

Some major work to standardise the national policies and ways of thinking regarding quality assurance has been done by the European Commission during the last years. A result of this is the Common Quality Assurance Framework: a set of common principals, criteria and tools in the area of (A)VET for a national level. However what still is needed is

an elaboration and translation of this framework at (A)VET providers level: a framework that brings into harmony EU policy, national context and policy, and providers own policy and model choices and its input and effort on QA. Not to make our "quality assurance life" even more complex by introducing another model, but instead making it more simple and usable for all people involved in teaching in professional education and training.

The CQAF (A)VET project

The development of a common EU operational model for QA has not been an easy task. Apart from being practical and usable a model should not impose additional work to organizations that are already using systems or models for QA (EU policy, national policy, own choice of quality policy). Thus this means that a common EU operational model should incorporate the core elements of all national policy as well as the core elements of the QA approaches that are in use in the different countries. Thus trying to bring back in the heart of this new common framework the essence of good education and training.



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To achieve this in 2009 the five partner countries¹ set out a development route using the quality model of Folksuniversitetet as a starting point. In this QA policy special attention has been paid to issues like needs analysis and correspondence with labour market demands, systematic stakeholders involvement and evaluation, selection of pedagogical approaches and the flexibility of education providers. But it was also ISO based. To become of real generic use it should be possible that a EU model is used without the specific contingencies (and costs) of f.e.

ISO framework or other more formal QA models.

Interviews and research in 20 provider organizations in the 5 countries lead to the definition of eleven core themes that were considered as relevant for good professional education and training. For each of these core themes a set of indicators have been defined consisting each of four different QA levels. The framework of themes and indicators was tested again in different provider organizations in each partner country to see whether the model was usable, whether provider organizations agreed that the model described the essence of good education, and whether it helped organizations to describe actions for

further development of their own QA. This testing and feedback has been used to finalize the model in its current form.

The model explained

To ensure quality² of vocational education and training the CQAF-(A)VET model distinguishes three axes which contribute to a desired outcome of learning processes (see diagram).

1. Content and Learning		2. The Organization		3. The Learner	
1.1	Curriculum	2.1	Leadership	3.1	Accessibility
1.2	Learning methods	2.2	Outcome and accountability	3.2	Guidance and care structure
1.3	Intake and entrance level	2.3	Staff development and staff allocation	3.3	Apprenticeship and work based learning
1.4	Coaching, mentoring and supervision	2.4	Social responsibility	3.4	Examination

¹ Project coordinator: Folksuniversitetet Uppsala, and project partners Dimitra (Greece), Documenta (Spain), MMI (Cyprus and Revalento (Netherlands)

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² Within this model the following EU-definition of quality is used: Quality of any educational institute depends on the capacity to achieve prior set targets (Technical Working Group on Quality, Faurschau, CEDEFOP, 2003)



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The first axe relates to essential themes regarding the (determination of) content and learning methodologies used. The second axe relates to some vital organizational themes that are essential for the delivery of education and training. And the third axe covers important themes that address issues of the learner. Each axe consists of four themes, each theme having its own indicators.

The model incorporates a total of 28 indicators to monitor and assess quality measures (to be) taken at a basic level (1) as well as at a more sophisticated level (up to level 4 of an indicator). Most important: in its focus the model helps to demonstrate what people and staff actually do. In many European countries national policy is putting more and more the constraint on outcome and purpose, self evaluation and continuous improvement. Therefore the model explicitly focuses each theme and its related indicators on outcome and purpose, respecting context, stakeholders and clients, and on continuous evaluation in general.

In Quality Assurance an organization is asked to provide evidence to a third independent party (f.e. an external assessor, the Inspectorate etc.) to give prove of their quality. The CQAF (A)VET model focuses in the same way. For each indicator at each level the organization is asked

whether one can give evidence (to a third party) that one is indeed acting at a certain level. Reflection on the potential evidence that is available will contribute to the preparation of organizations to meet national or regional criteria or on ways to develop it one step further.

“Workshop participant: When we discussed the model in our team during the workshop, our first impression was that we met the QA as described at the highest level for most of its indicators. But then we were asked to provide the evidence that we could prove that we were taking certain actions and that these actions were really effective. Rather rapidly it became clear to us that on paper our policy looked impressive but that we were not able to present the required evidence for this level. Based on the evidence that we could present we scored on average 2 instead of the initial 4. This was a good eye opener and gave us as a team lot of input for further improvement of our own programs and policy.”

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Although the model distinguishes 4 different levels for quality assurance, this does not mean that each organization should be able to meet at level 4 for all themes and indicators. Regional as well as national circumstances, rules and requirements may by their nature require for attention at level 1, 2 or 3 for some (or even all) indicators.

Working with the model

As a start the model can be used as a kind of self assessment tool for QA. Organizations that take their customers and stakeholders serious can use the self assessment questionnaire to assesses whether they are able to comply to level 2 of the model or not. The questionnaire feedback at indicator level will provide them with information for further development of their QA policy. Ideally this assessment is done as a team exercise.

Like any Quality Assurance model it is vital that the process of quality assurance is not something which is solely owned by the management of the organization. For quality assurance of the teaching programs to become really effective it needs the active involvement of those who

Employer's involvement	1	The organization can demonstrate that the content of the curriculum is acknowledged by (regional) employer representatives .
	2	The organization can prove that employer representatives have contributed to the development of the content of the curriculum.
	3	The organization can demonstrate that in the development as well as the delivery of the curriculum (regional) employer representative are actively involved .

mple indicator description

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deliver the teaching: the teaching staff. To achieve that kind of involvement it requires a clear vision and warm commitment of the management to promote this and give this involvement a clear shape as well as clear continuity within the organization. Such involvement not only leads to satisfied students and (more) customers, but also to satisfied and involved employers, focused and committed staff and a motivated team.

For more information regarding the model that is presented in this article contact

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