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Executive Summary

“*Working on quality is fun*” this quote by one of the team managers involved in the NLQAVET project illustrates the impact of the pilot at team level.

The project was built around two main pillars:

- an inventory on the current situation of Quality Assurance (QA) in The Netherlands at VET provider level
- a ‘test and taste’ for VET providers stimulating a culture of quality improvement at provider level through pilots at team level

Other activities included two conferences and dissemination activities. International partners cooperated and provided feedback. The project was aimed at VET Providers, stakeholders and policy makers of VET in the Netherlands (& Europe). It was aimed at providing the target groups with input on QA to enhance QA within their organizations, whether this is on institutional, local, regional or national level.

Inventory of QA at provider level

The project inventory of the current situation of QA in the Netherlands at VET provider level showed that in the participating institutions:

- Commitment and involvement for Quality Assurance is larger at management level than at team and ‘work floor’ level
- Tension between learning and development versus (internal and external) accountability as goals for Quality Assurance
- When it comes to implementing the P-D-C-A cycle the last step(s) are not always implemented, the circle is not round (yet)

These results emphasize that ‘only’ putting a quality management system in place is not sufficient. In order to really sustainably improve the quality you also need to develop a quality culture. The second part of this project focused on this element of quality assurance.

‘Test and taste’ for VET providers stimulating a culture of quality improvement at provider level

The conceptual framework used in the NLQAVET project shows that the quality system is just one of the elements that are of importance when wanting to achieve sustainable quality improvement. Next to quality system(s), quality oriented behavior, quality culture and quality awareness are the aspects of importance and included in the conceptual framework.

In four pilot teams this project focused on achieving a quality culture at team level and involving teams of teachers in quality assurance. This has been achieved by organizing team and management sessions focusing on achieving improvements towards a concrete quality goal and working on achieving quality awareness and quality culture and commitment towards working on quality assurance. For example one of the pilot teams focused on improving career guidance by together following and implementing the P-D-C-A cycle. An important result is that the team achieved this not by having to implement this but by wanting to improve from an individual and a collective perspective.

The experiences in these four pilot teams have been gathered in a webtool (www.nlgavet.nl). This webtool aims at helping employees involved in quality assurance and teammanagers to work on stimulating a culture of quality improvement at team level.

There are three ways to enter the website;

- Getting started with a toolbox including all interventions that can be used at teamlevel
- The stories of the educational teams in the pilots
- The underlying conceptual framework

Within the project much attention was paid to further dissemination of the project results and including a broader public in the project. A main way to achieve this has been by providing workshops where participants can experience themselves the different elements of the NLQAVET approach and are invited to reflect on their own practices and how NLQAVET can help them improve. After the project has ended this will continue by building up a train the trainer network.

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1. Project Objectives

The European Commission published a special Call for Proposal on 31st of March 2010. The purpose of this call for proposals was to award grants to bodies responsible for the implementation of a national strategy for improving quality-assurance systems and for promoting and developing the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in order to help these bodies in their task and in promoting the development of a quality culture among stakeholders in the field of vocational education and training. One of the 5 selected projects was NLQAVET that ran for two full years in 2011-2012.

The NLQAVET project had the following aims and objectives:

1. At national level making an inventory of quality assurance systems and knowledge sharing
2. Stimulating a culture of Quality improvement at provider level to do Test and Taste for VET providers
3. Promote the EQAVET recommendation in the Netherlands, with a focus on the descriptors (PDCA) and indicators by conferences, workshops, communication strategy, website with marketplace and forum, using social media
4. Strengthen the Dutch Quality Assurance National Reference Point by boosting the activity level and placing EQAVET in the European policy context of the Copenhagen process
5. Involve all stakeholders in QA
6. Include private VET providers and all sectors in the QA system

The main target group of this project were VET institutes and stakeholders of Dutch VET at policy and institutional level. More specific the results are especially of interest to those involved in Quality Assurance; quality coordinators and teammanager in VET institutes, management. At policy level ministry and other stakeholders can use the results to adapt policy.

A steering group (advisory committee EQAVET), consisting of all relevant stakeholders (including Ministry of Education) responsible for QA in their organisations, played an important role in monitoring and functions as a critical friend in all activities during the project. The project was started on the basis of an inventory of the needs of these stakeholders and the advisory group is therefore committed towards the project and the implementation and dissemination of project results.

Both VET providers and stakeholders can benefit from the completed inventory. This inventory provides a picture of the state of QA in 2011 of 27 national VET institutes. VET institutes recognised the main conclusions and got the opportunity to learn from each other. Also the results were used to further improve QA in VET.

The results of the inventory were used and discussed by the network of QA coordinators in VET. At policy level the results were used by the advisory group EQAVET to set priorities regarding the development of QA in the Netherlands.

Finally the results were presented and discussed during the Quality TIME field consultation event, leading to concrete recommendations for QA in VET.

The international partners took part in this conference and got acquainted with the outcomes of the inventory.

One of the priorities set by the EQAVET advisory committee was and still is the involvement of teams in Quality Assurance; intrinsic motivation and quality awareness are important terms. The survey also showed that the commitment and involvement of teams in Quality Assurance can and should be improved.

The test and taste with four pilots on culture of QA dealt with these issues. In parallel with the teams also team and higher management was involved. By meeting higher management the aim was to have an effect on the total institute instead of only on the involved team.

The project resulted in an online webtool including a description of interventions in these four teams that improved their culture on QA. It is aimed at setting an example with these practices for other VET institutes to improve their culture of QA. Stakeholders and policy makers can use the information from the inventory and pilot to better understand and adapt policy to the current situation of QA and set sharper goals.

Diverse methods of dissemination were used including an article that might be published in one of the magazines focusing on Dutch VET.

To enlarge the impact diverse workshops throughout the country were organized. The workshops focused on disseminating and exploiting the results to a broader target group. During the workshops participants got the opportunity to learn about the pilots projects and to get to know and work with the webtool. The webtool was also shown at the final conference of the project, where diverse stakeholders and VET-institutes were present.

The webtool is quite unique within The Netherlands although QA is high on the agenda, the accent on team level is relatively new. Participants in the final conference and the regional workshops were interested and glad to have hands-on tools that not only focus on the systematic and instrumental part of QA, but tools that provide a way to work on and improve culture and quality awareness. Besides this they appreciated that the webtool provides sufficient space to use it in your own context. It really stimulates to start the improvement from within your own context, own goals and own motivation. Also the conceptual framework improves the communication about quality management. The framework makes clear that quality systems are only one element of QM. The focus on team level (teachers) is consistent with the current national policy on strengthening the professionalism of teachers. Now the tool is finished, the effort on QA at team level will continue.

The follow-up is encountered in the working programme of the NCP EQAVET 2013.

Users of the webtool have concluded that the tools are really hands-on, but at the same time they concluded that starting a process in a team is difficult too. They articulated the need to have more training and asked for workshops or training on location to stimulate the use of the webtool in their own institute. Besides that the question was how keep the website alive and how to stimulate knowledge development around these topics.

All these questions resulted in the further development and exploitation of NLQAVET being one of the important priorities for the NCP EQAVET in the Netherlands in 2013.

More workshops and trainings directed at team managers or quality assurance managers will be developed and organised.

The goal of these training sessions is to make them well known with the content of the webtool and the way they can use the conceptual framework. In the training attention will also be paid to how to guide a team in a process like this. If the quality coordinators have

increased their knowledge and skills they can be a trainer of the topic in their own institute. This concept is called train-the-trainer concept.

Furthermore there will be a network with users of the webtool. The goal of the network is to increase the knowledge around the topic and think about new developments or tools for the webtool.

2. Project Approach

In January 2011 the NCP EQAVET composed a project team with experts of both quality assurance, VET and EQAVET. The project team was responsible developing the survey (inventory) for VET institutions, guiding the pilots and gathering the pilot results.

Inventory of QA at provider level

The survey focused on three aspects of Quality Assurance (QA):

1. Policy of QA (written documents)
2. Execution of QA (what are true actions)
3. Impact of QA (influence on the quality of education)

The survey has been a true inventory, there was no scientific justification as its purpose was to get an idea of the current situation of QA in VET institutes. Results can and should not be generalized but it was possible to discover common features that lead to several conclusions. The steering group, consisting of stakeholders (including policy makers) provided feedback while designing the inventory. Also the Finnish partner, with expertise in designing and sending out surveys on QA in VET at national level, was involved in the design.

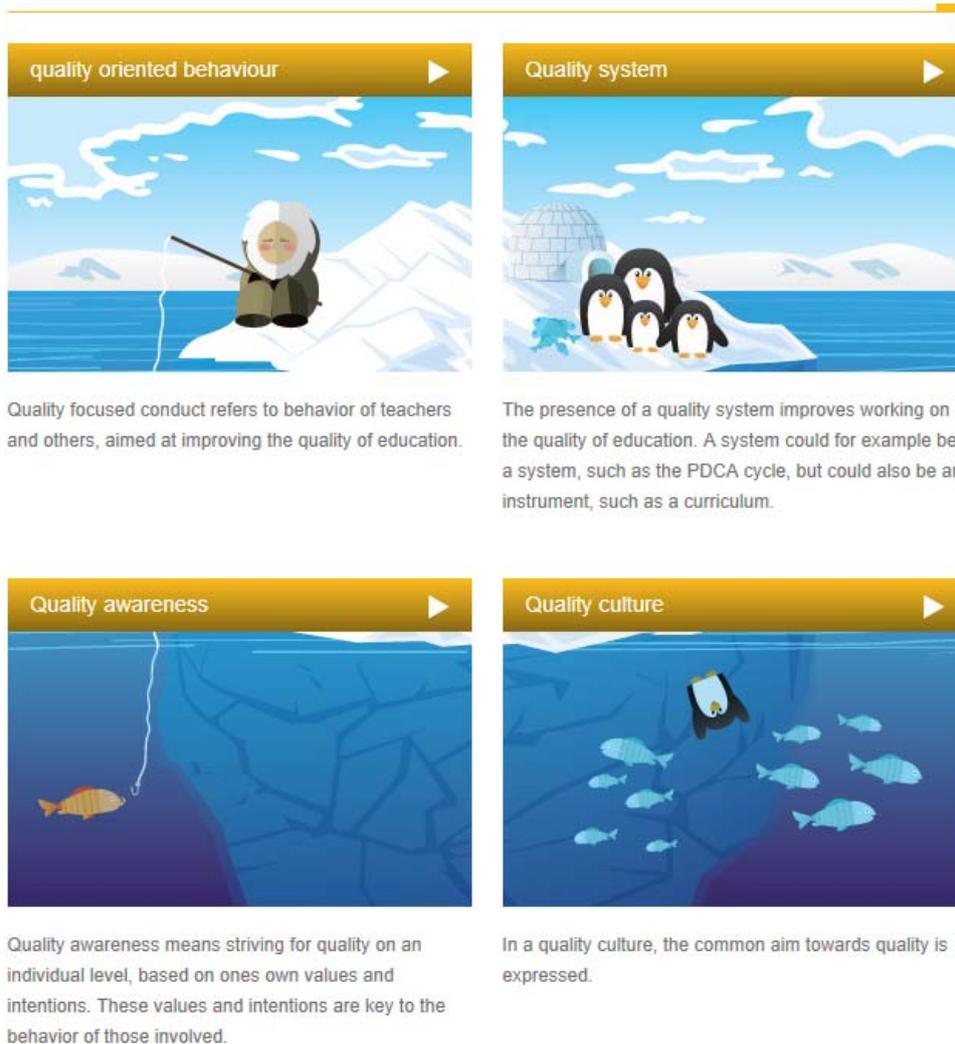
“Test and taste” for VET providers stimulating a culture of quality improvement at provider level

In determining an approach for the pilots, the project team had several meetings with external Dutch experts on QA. These meetings provided the project team with feedback on their concepts, broadened their knowledge on culture of QA and created a common understanding. A conceptual framework has been developed that frames interventions and developments within the pilots. As described before this conceptual model consists of 4 aspects:

- Quality system
- Quality oriented behavior
- Quality awareness
- Quality culture

To be able to have a good functioning **quality system** (for example a handbook regarding examination) and to develop a team of individuals showing **quality oriented behavior** (that can be noticed) (for example all work with the same exam) individual **quality awareness** is necessary and a joint feeling (this is how we do it) **quality culture** is needed.

These four aspects together form an iceberg with one part above, and another below sea level (see below). This is to reflect the fact that the process and returns for improving quality of education are above (visible) and below (less visible) sea level. The process is partly about objective, substantive matters, referred to as IT, and partly about individual, human, culture aspects, respectively referred to as I and WE. The realization of sustainable quality is all about the interaction between the IT, I and WE, the interaction between the aspects above and under the sealevel. All need to get their fair amount of attention. On the one hand attention to content (educational matters, systems and structures), and on the other hand attention to the intentions of individuals and the culture of teams.



Quality focused conduct refers to behavior of teachers and others, aimed at improving the quality of education.

The presence of a quality system improves working on the quality of education. A system could for example be a system, such as the PDCA cycle, but could also be an instrument, such as a curriculum.

Quality awareness means striving for quality on an individual level, based on ones own values and intentions. These values and intentions are key to the behavior of those involved.

In a quality culture, the common aim towards quality is expressed.

Each pilot consisted of team sessions and management sessions.

All pilot teams started with the same starting session with the teams. The aim of this first session was, besides an introduction to the pilots, to 'make a picture' of the current and desired situation on a topic of the educational process chosen by the team and/or management themselves. Through a scan we first determined the dominant culture within the teams, and the teams expressed their desired culture. This scan was based on four orientations (open, rational, social, self-focused). A similar scan was developed for the management because the pilot had a focus on both team and management, at the same time and apart from each other (management meetings). The supporting consultants who guided these pilots, were asked to make notes of all observations in order to have as much information possible to describe the practices afterwards. This information about the culture helped throughout all the sessions as it could put behavior in perspective. Secondly, the method of appreciative inquiry was used to let the team point out what was going well and what their dream of the future would be (concerning their chosen topic). Also appreciative inquiry helped to develop commitment within the team towards the quality goals and the pilot process. The first sessions were marked by a positive response mainly because of the use of appreciative inquiry, experienced as a very positive way to work on improvement of quality. This method provided room to talk about things that go well at individual level but also on team level and how you can use these things that go well for further improvement. This first

session was a good starting point for the following sessions as enough information was gathered about the working culture, attitude towards QA and aims concerning the topic chosen by the pilot.

In order to have the opportunity to respond to the individual needs and culture of each team, the next steps & sessions were designed together with the team and management. In this way ownership was created and it was possible to connect to their needs and current situation and context. In all cases the conceptual framework was taken as a basis for reflection on the results during the process and for making decisions to do the right things in the next session. Depending on the program and the needs and wishes of the team of each meeting the framework was explicit or implicit present during the sessions. To maintain coherence between the four pilots (overall) and to remain focused on the main goal of the pilots, the NLQAVET-team had meetings in between the pilot sessions to exchange ideas, scripts and troublesome aspects. These meetings contributed to a comfortable balance between alignment between the pilots and retaining ownership within the pilots in order to best develop a culture of QA.

Even though culture changes are hard to measure and take a long time, a way to make developments measurable was found. At first it was planned to use the scan (first session) at the end as well and thereby 'measure' results. Progressive insights changed this into final interviews, a more qualitative way to measure results that seemed more suitable for the pilots. These interviews have given valuable information about the results and impact of the pilots. In all cases managers could notice effects, these effects depended on the processes and efforts of the teams. Worth mentioning is that in most pilots the awareness of the WE has been strengthened, teams are more aware of how their colleagues behave, are more aware of who are the owners of 'quality' and there is a more common language and picture to develop education. Besides that the teams also have concrete results in the form of a handbook, a procedure or instrument around a concrete educational topic, where they can go work with. This combination between visible and invisible results was one the success factors of the project.

Quality Assurance

During the project, an external evaluator acted as a critical friend. Dr. Ellen Verheijen from the Expertise Center on VET has been the external evaluator. The project coordinator and external evaluator composed a plan. According to the plan, several meetings between project coordinator and external evaluator have taken place. Furthermore the external evaluator was present during the first conference and one of the joint knowledge sharing sessions. Also interviews with pilot team members helped to get an insight. The project team also developed an internal Quality Assurance plan. Each team session with the pilots was evaluated and the results of these evaluations were used and discussed during management sessions to plan and improve further developments and interventions.

Dissemination

The project team developed a communication and dissemination strategy. This strategy covered all project steps. For each step it was identified how the results were disseminated, to whom and when. The dissemination activities were aimed at different goals and different target groups. The different target groups consisted of team coordinators, directors, quality

coordinators, policy makers and others involved in VET and interested in how to work on a quality of culture.

On regular basis people in the field were informed about the project process and the results. By regularly informing the target group, they were alerted to EQAVET and NLQAVET and over time broadened and deepened their knowledge.

Different canals were used for informing the target group. In the list below an overview of the measures used can be found.

Website - On the website of the NCP EQAVET (www.eqavet.nl) there is a heading for NLQAVET. Here regular project updates were provided. Furthermore the methodology, pilot stories and all interventions used can be found at www.nlqavet.nl. This website is dedicated to people who want to work on developing a quality culture and involving teams of teachers and trainers in QA.

Newsflash – The NCP EQAVET newsflash provided updates regarding the NLQAVET project.

Factsheet - A special factsheet on NLQAVET was developed for easy handing out compact information during face to face meetings.

For dissemination different kinds of activities were organized or attended with different kind of goals and target groups.

The project team decided that to let the dissemination and exploitation be effective it is important that the participants experience themselves elements of the approach and interventions that were used in the pilots. The idea behind this was that when you have an experience by yourself it will make more impact than when you are only told about the experience. Besides this the result of the project (the webtool) is very hands-on which made it possible to let people experience the content of the webtool.

Especially managers were targeted instead of only staff members. Because the managers are the ones responsible for the results of their team and the way the team works together.

Workshops – In October 2011 and 2012, the NCP EQAVET attended the national yearly conference for VET .

Besides promoting EQAVET, NLQAVET was also promoted by a special workshop in which the results of the survey were presented.

In November 2011 the NLQAVET project was introduced at a workshop during the contact seminar in Groningen – Quality Professionals in VET.

In January and February 2013 the project team organized two regional workshops. The goal of these workshops was to explore the webtool and to let people think about how they can use the webtool in their own context. Quality coordinators and team leaders attended to the workshops.

During the exploitation workshops participants experienced some of the interventions used in the pilot teams, afterwards they were invited to reflect why these tools could be effective, how they fit into the conceptual framework and what are the conditions to work with these tools. Furthermore participants were challenged to reflect on their own work in their own team, and how these tools can help them achieving their goals. One of the participants concluded that if you like to work on culture and if you like to change the culture of a team it is necessary to first be aware on how you work on quality yourself. If you are able to reflect

on your own way of working and provide a good example the impact of the change will be bigger.

Conferences - On 28 September 2011 the NCP EQAVET organized a national conference. During this event VET stakeholders, teachers, staff and managers of VET institutes discussed priorities in QA for the Dutch I-VET institutions. The steering committee presented their view on this and participants got the possibility to add their own ideas and there was ample opportunity to discuss in small groups. During this conference the conclusions of the survey were presented and some of the pilot schools (wp3) introduced themselves. In the context of the support of the EQAVET projects we participated at the dissemination meetings organized by the MENON network in Vienna, Brussels, Breukelen and Bucharest.

In January the project finished with a final conference. In this conference all results of the project were presented and ideas how to promote the use of the results and to increase the impact of the project were discussed.

Next to these workshops and conferences organized by the project NLQAVET was presented at diverse conferences on VET and quality assurance in VET in the Netherlands.

Concluding; the strategy used for all conferences and meetings is to let people experience and let them explore from that point what the impact and next steps can be. It was decided to present the results as a different, new way of working that needs to evolve from this point on. Participants got to know the way of thinking and to try to think together of best next steps for making this new way of working have more impact.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The Dutch national reference point for EQAVET started off the NLQAVET project in January 2011. Together with our partners we have been able to reach the goals and results that have been set. An overview can be found below.

Results Survey/Inventory (WP2)

1. Online survey
2. In-depth interviews (outcomes were processed in the report)
3. Report of the online survey
4. Inventory of QA systems used

(http://www.eqavet.nl/1_802_Inventarisatie_van_kwaliteitszorg_op_instellingsniveau.aspx)

Results Pilot on culture of QA (WP 3)

5. The pilots, stimulating a culture of quality improvement, started in 2011 and finished
6. in 2012, the results can be found at www.nlqavet.nl

Results Dissemination/Evaluation

7. Website (www.eqavet.nl / www.nlqavet.nl)
8. EQAVET conferences and workshops
9. Communication plan (internal)
10. Promotion materials, leaflet in Dutch and English
http://www.eqavet.nl/images/user/leaflet%20NL-NLQAVET.p_20120127110933.pdf
http://www.eqavet.nl/images/user/leaflet%20EN-NLQAVET.p_20120127111631.pdf
Leaflet EQAVET indicators at provider level (in Dutch)
http://www.eqavet.nl/images/user/EQAVET%20Indicatieve%20descriptoren%20voor%20aanbieders%20van%20beroepsopleidingen.p_20120127112454.pdf
11. External evaluation report (internal)

Explanation Survey/Inventory

The online survey was sent out to all VET institutes of which 27 replied. The survey was set out in May 2011 to QA-staff in I-VET institutions.

After the completed surveys were collected, experts analyzed the data and draw conclusions. Part of these conclusions shows us good practices in the Netherlands. And also challenges. The outcomes of the report strengthened the NLQAVET project that has a focus on culture of quality assurance. One of the conclusions was that QA is mainly owned or practiced by managers and staff and not so often by teams/teacher. A different conclusion was that QA most of the times was used for internal and external accountability and not for learning to improve the quality of education. The outcomes of the survey were useful for the steering group to give direction to their priorities in implementing EQAVET in the Netherlands. Furthermore, QA staff in VET institutes that completed the survey can use the results in strengthening their ideas and policy on how to work on QA with impact towards their managers. It also empowered the need for the pilots (WP3) as the awareness of QA turned out to be weak among teachers.

Explanation Pilots focusing on culture of QA

In June, right after the survey, VET institutions received a call for participating in the pilots. After receiving several applications and running interviews with these institutions to check their relevance and true commitment, five VET-institutes were selected. Finally four VET institutes started with a pilot. The results of the pilots and of the projects are illustrated in the chapters above. In this part further information regarding the impact and results can be found. The main impact is that the focus on the culture of quality is reassured. More and more people in the VET field on all kind of layers in the institutes are getting convinced that a culture of quality is needed for reaching real quality in way of learning and improving. They more and more realize that only instruments, procedures and systems is not enough for reaching that goal. When realizing that working on culture is important, they also realize that it is a complex topic. Subsequently the next question is what to do to start a change in culture. The webtool offers a conceptual framework, hands-on tools and practical advices and success factors in order to help achieving this goal. It offers a methodology to guide teams that want to improve their quality of education. This methodology is based on two elements: improve the educational content (quality systems and quality focused behavior) and the human element (people together form the organization and the quality) (quality awareness and quality culture). When working on quality improvements in teams both elements are of importance. The webtool offers guidance when wanting to work on this.

The conceptual framework illustrated with the iceberg provides for a common language about QA. It consists of words that are easy to understand. People that use think it is complete and it puts QA in a different perspective, other than for example the QM systems on management level. It usable in a practical, daily manner. Many times the conversation about quality of culture was only about what it is, the content. The project provided also a way to speak about how to work on a culture of quality above and under the sea level of the iceberg.

The policy of the ministry of education is aimed at improving the quality of VET. The policy consists of several ways to elicit an improvement. The results of the NLQAVET project help in achieving the policy objectives.

Explanation Dissemination

The strategy for dissemination is explained in chapter 2. By including the network of Quality coordinators of VET institutes and providing workshops at different occasions almost every VET institute in the Netherlands has been reached by the dissemination activities.

Events that prevented the project to achieve the expected results

Originally both I-VET and private (mostly C-VET) were to be involved in the survey and pilots. Unfortunately due to external developments the body of private VET providers had to change priorities and decided not to participate in the survey and test and taste. They are, however, still part of the EQAVET advisory committee and in that way follow project developments. Also the private VET providers were informed about the project results in their newsletter.

4. Partnerships

A project team was compiled based on expertise of both QA and EQAVET. This group of six people was responsible for developing the survey and developing and guiding the pilot meetings. These people are also experienced in guiding team processes in VET and have knowledge of the Dutch system of QA.

A steering group (advisory group EQAVET), consisting of all relevant stakeholders (including Ministry of Education) that are responsible for QA in their organizations acted as a monitor and critical friend in all activities during the project. Also the steering group was responsible for disseminating project results to the organizations which they represent.

Internationally, we had three partners that are all experts on QA in their countries. They participate in the two conferences and provide us with feedback on specific areas of expertise. During the conference in September 2011, all the foreign partners (FI, RO, AU) were present and in addition the representative in charge of EQAVET of the European Commission. A project partner meeting was organised the day before the conference to present the state of play of the NLQAVET project. We informed our international partners about the progress and difficulties and they could reflect on our plans and developments as well. During the actual conference, all four of them gave presentations. The European Commission gave a general overview presentation about the development of EQAVET. Our three international partners presented their best practices to the audience. We received lots of positive feedback on this part of the conference, the Dutch audience was interested to hear more about these good practices.

During the final conference one of the workshops was dedicated to the international dimension in QA. During this workshops participants got acquainted with different ways of working on QA and were able to learn from the practices in Romania, Austria and Finland.

5. Plans for the Future

The theme of this project; developing a culture of quality assurance at team level is still of relevance in the Netherlands. The further dissemination and exploitation of the NLQAVET approach is part of the work programme of the National Coordination Point EQAVET in the Netherlands. This will be done by developing a train the trainer and network bringing together people working on the theme. Also this network is aiming at further developing the NLQAVET webtool and include more experiences and results. A forum function has been added to the website to stimulate interaction between users. The need for this approach has also been expressed by several participants of the exploitation workshops and conferences and the network of quality coordinators in VET. Furthermore the ministry of education has expressed the need to further work on the theme. With this approach it is aimed to have the trainers further disseminate the NLQAVET approach and make them 'owner'. The NCP will stimulate and facilitate this process.

Furthermore one of the aims of the coming period is to link different initiatives regarding quality assurance. These include different approaches for working on quality and all have their own strengths and weaknesses. To really be effective these initiatives should be linked in a smart way, to increase the impact. One of the aims of the NCP EQAVET is to facilitate and contribute to this process.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Looking at the Bruges Communiqué, Quality of VET is a strategic objective for 2011-2020:

(Bruges Communiqué, pages 7-8)

Quality assurance

(a) High quality of VET provision is a prerequisite for its attractiveness. In order to guarantee improved quality, increased transparency, mutual trust, the mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning, participating countries should establish quality assurance frameworks in accordance with the EQAVET Recommendation;

(b) Participating countries should - by the end of 2015 - establish at national level a common quality assurance framework for VET providers, which also applies to associated workplace learning and which is compatible with the EQAVET framework.

The NLQAVET project contributes to the above mentioned objectives because on the one hand, we have made a mapping of the current situation of QA in VET. This enables the policy makers and other stakeholders taking part in the steering group to set national goals and give direction to new policies. We have also determined that QA is generally speaking owned by management and staff in The Netherlands and the pilot in our project aims at developing tools to raise awareness on QA among teachers. On the other hand, the steering group mirrored the current tools for QA in The Netherlands with the EQAVET descriptors and indicators and discovered that we do already cover all aspects, nevertheless there is always room for improvements and challenges are pointed out too.