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VET QUALITY IN ICT SECTOR - VET QI

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Executive Summary

VET QI (VET QUALITY ICT) project wants to promote the adoption of innovative quality systems in VET applied to small and medium sized companies in ICT sector and their VET operators. The main issue that the project wanted to tackle was the important gap in vocational training's quality system applied to ICT SMEs at European level. While larger companies have already developed high standard quality systems for training, no structure or initiative help the Small and Medium Enterprises to evaluate the training received. This was the starting point for the consortium. The goal to be reached was the definition of a Quality Control System allowing the SMEs' staff to be more prepared and competitive but also helping VET operators to be more in line with market requirements. The consortium is based on a long-time relationship with shared and complementary expertise. FOR SAS (IT) has qualified staff (manager, experts , trainers) with almost 15 year experiences in the field and it is in charge of the whole managing of the project. EUROFORTIS (LV) specialized in new tendencies in Quality management and Development of personal qualities in companies was in charge of quality plan. MPS (FR) with high experience in European projects and with reference in communication and promotional process, was leading the dissemination but also supporting the background for exploitation. UNIGE (IT) and WSBINOZ (PL) being Universities were involved in the definition of field research – analysing quality references and addressing the fundamental phase of market requirement analysis and direct involvement of Companies and VET operators. IPF / (ES) - a consulting and research company specialized in the field of education and training projects - was co-leader for the exploitation work package where the partners were able to build a future path for VETQI outcomes. The VET QI project detected and tested innovative practices for VET operators providing services in coherent with European policies and market requirements. The harmonisation of criteria coming from EQAVET and other quality assurance reference at national and European level, together with market requirements defined a background model. VET QI consortium followed a wide approach, involve and stimulate not only target groups, but also stakeholders and relevant experts coming from Vocational Training Sectors, Enterprises associations, public entities, trade unions and representatives from certification bodies throughout Europe. The aim of this overall involvement was to help the project in its development, starting from basic support ensuring high level research standards and achievement of the required number of companies and VET operators for testing phase. They also assured quality of inputs in terms of criteria, indicators and procedures supporting furthermore the quality of the certification procedures and related outputs. VETQI conducted a pre – test and experimentation phases for certification and labelling procedures on a high number of target groups (more than 150 VET providers and 600 SMEs) fulfilling requirements linked to the project and his coherence with the EQAVET principles. The main products achieved by the project are an experimental certification procedure based on online specific pre-assessment and ground certification guide supported by the web tool for evaluation of internal procedures. This procedure for VET operators and ICT SMEs was integrated by specific guidelines for implementation of quality assurance procedures in target groups. A label of excellence for target group representatives and professionals contributes to promote and apply the values behind the project (the VETQI Quality Label network). With the regard of this item, a specific certificates and registered trademark were issued. Another important result is the wide participation granted by stakeholders related to vocational training and ICT sector gathered during the project. Among them, EQAVET and QALLL networks invited the VETQI referents to share the VETQI principles within their members, widening the dissemination of the project.

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1. Project Objectives

VETQI project was born with the fundamental idea of influencing the effectiveness of vocational training provision for small and medium sized enterprises in ICT. This sector is one of the main factor for growth at European level and, above all, it is featured at more than 80% by small and medium enterprises. Their constant need of effective and market oriented training is one of the most relevant issue for overcoming crisis and competitiveness at European level. This theme was experienced directly by the consortium members as they are active in the VET field and in direct contact with ICT SMEs companies: while larger enterprises for their dimension, organisational approach and financial capability had already developed high standard quality systems for training there are no common procedures and support initiatives for ICT SMEs although they are the core element for this sector.

The VETQI project wants to build up innovative methods for ICT SMEs to get qualitative training and results by applying a protocol of procedures in coherence with quality European policies. These methods are developed on the basis of the confrontation with market needs, stakeholders' perspectives and European policies about quality in VET.

In this sense main project objectives are:

- Reduce the gap between VET training offer and competences needed on the ICT SME market;
- Increase attractiveness in the quality of VET emphasizing his real benefit in the efficient and contents of the services training supply;
- Improve tools and effectiveness of ongoing VET by working directly on ICT SMEs European market and on real final users.
- Build on collected experiences on VET processes in enterprises in order to plan improvement by through quality tools proposed in VET QI project.
- Elaborate sustainable, concrete and transferable tools, based on EQVAET approach.
- Create, share and apply guarantee process for quality systems in VET, based on EQAVET but also develop a recognition system of indicators for VET quality certification.
- Support the development of different modalities of implementation of indicators given by EQAVET and other European policies for VET.

The project and its outcomes were designed to work on t quality assurance level taking in feedbacks from the final users. This is particularly important for harmonizing the theory behind the project and the market analysis related to the training needs from SMEs - ICT sector. Achievement of this harmony is the key for an effective application of outcomes and exploitation of the project. The final users of the project are basically two: on the one hand Vet Providers as active 'actors' of training and on the other hand the ICT Small and Medium enterprises as final beneficiaries of the training supplied. Their involvement went over the simple testing of procedures throughout the project and become a support and a constant source of inputs for development of project outputs. In this sense, all the moments of direct contact with them were satisfying for the partnership because they confirmed the real need of companies for effective training and their will to contribute.

Another key point for user community approach was the extensive involvement campaign of stakeholders' engagement, coming from VET, ICT sector, Quality bodies and Public Authorities. This led to the active involvement of other partners at European level such as the Consortium QALLL (Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning), the Italian ENQAVET Reference Point ISFOL, Peer reviewers from different institutions, association of Enterprises such as PIN SME, Trade Unions, representatives from e-CF and CEN sector (in the light to a future project development) and experts coming from key certification bodies at European level such as

Dekra. Their involvement granted an effective added value to the projects (and its outcomes) as they brought several and relevant issues and inputs that the partnership kept during the elaboration of their overall work.

The potential impact of the overall initiative is, firstly a renewed consideration on how training can be performed for Ict SMEs in the light of a process of ongoing improvement. The creation of the tangible products - The VETQI Certification procedure, its certificates, the registered trademark and the related guidelines - can in facts, modify the behaviour of companies in their approach to vocational training: the overall VETQI system offers ways and indications for achieving a procedural and effective training initiatives working on all its phases – from planning to final review . The role of vocational training is fundamental in ICT sector where required updates of competencies for workers are ongoing. An effectively trained company has better opportunities to approach the market and be competitive. On the other hand, the competition effect could be also valuable for VET providers as they could count on a European oriented architecture for their development. A recognition of a European wide certification/label could be the starting point for offering better focused training.

On a wider extent, the potential impact of the project is the creation of a sort of “meeting place” where target groups could really reduce the gap between Vocational training offer and competences needed on the ICT SMEs market. Supporting effective and recognizable training paths lead also to increase attractiveness of VET systems and strength the governance on these sectors. The whole project showed how fundamental is the value of cooperation between social parts, Vet providers and enterprises and other relevant stakeholders

2. Project Approach

The approach followed by the project was born under the consideration that the outcomes of VETQI was built in coherence of EQAVET (ex EQARF) approach with specific targets: SMES ICT and Vet providers.

From an operational point of view the project established the ground for an ongoing system of verification of project results and procedures.

The definition of its outputs started with a specific background research looking at statistical and context analysis related to ICT Sector and training provided. The processed data had to be the reference to address the project activities aiming complete and relevant outcomes adaptable to each involved context.

While the quality assurance framework selected at proposal stage was EQAVET, the research led to implement some issue coming from different sources

- ISO 29990:2010 - quality certification for Education providers-;
- Market needs analysis researches;
- QALLL networks - www.qalll.eu -;
- ISTAT (Italian National Institute for Statistics) data and similar references for each country.

The first output from this background research was a draft evaluation system for quality assurance constituted by indicators that were later transferred in single evaluation items.

These “raw materials” were shared within the consortium and with a series of stakeholders/experts and were at the basis of a pre-test phase for feedback from final target group.

In order to perform a more effective survey/pre-test the target groups were asked to verify their training approach considering a group of quality indicators while experts and peer reviewers were checking and evaluating the whole process. In this phase, the target reached were more than 50 ICT SMES and 25 Vet operators. In this phase. This step was also testing period for functioning of the web tool for quality assurance evaluation, managed by University of Genova. On the basis of this first analysis and in accordance with the experts supporting the some parameters and indicators of quality assurance in training were better defined looking at a more market oriented evaluation system.

The reviewed parameters were then tested in a larger experimentation phase done on a larger group of users - 500 ICT SMES and 125 Vet operators – always validated by external experts involved. The added value of this activity produced a first modification of methodologies applied: in order to better address the general EQAVET approach into the focused items of the project: a specific “quality interviews campaign” was launched in order to raise feedbacks on selected parameters for quality assurance in training directly from enterprises - 25 companies involved in total.

The results from the experimentation phase, (the quality interviews and the feedback from experts and peer reviewers) were related in the Exploitation phase where

- the whole procedures for quality assurance were fine-tuned,
- the web tool for quality evaluation was launched
- the addressing documents (the Guidelines for Training implementation for ICT SMEs) were published.

Once again tools and instruments produced were shared within consortium and therefore evaluated by the experts with the goal of keeping a high quality level for the provision of these materials.

A milestone in the VET QI methodology is the measurability of Project results on SMEs in the ICT sector and on Vet providers.

VET QI propose a continuous confrontation with Stakeholders and Experts with the PEER REVIEW MODEL. This model was undertaken for three main reasons:

- i. it is generally accepted and considered not invasive by the organizations that used it;
- ii. it is highly considered by the Institutions that used it (e.g. ISFOL: Italian Reference National Point for EQAVET);
- iii. it allows a “mutual learning” with an internal evaluation (of two target groups involved) and external evaluation

In this activity the key experts involved were representatives of all possible stakeholders for the project. In this sense, VETQI managed to have relevant feedbacks from selected stakeholders belonging to:

- VOCATIONAL TRAINING POLICY such as ISFOL, Italian Quality reference point from ISFOL, QALL Network;
- TRADE UNIONS such as CISL (Italy) CSIF Alhaurin (Spain);
- EUROPEAN COMPANIES ASSOCIATIONS such as PIN SME;
- EXPERTS from Certification bodies
- EXPERTS from CEN.

From a quantitative point of view, achieved targets are in line with the requirement established in the project form reaching the number of target groups (in WP4 50 ICT SMES and 25 Vet operators; in WP5 500 ICT SMES and 125 Vet operators plus 25 not originally foreseen interviews with ICT companies). Moreover, the produced outputs were achieved with a good cooperation inside the consortium and, above all, with appreciation from ICT SMES, VET experts and stakeholders, as proven by, for example, the feedback from the interviews and the overall participation to project activities. The audience of the final conference (more than 50 stakeholders registered, representatives from private and public entities) confirm the interest of the project results.

The project availed on an ongoing internal evaluation of outcomes and activities. This was granted by a specific work package, wp7, dedicated on internal quality with specific instruments for quality maintenance and tasks control. Other relevant feature of internal quality system is the presence of a qualified external expert. Mr Giorgio Allulli has specific competences on quality training processes at European level and he's also in charge as special expert for EQAVET network. He gave to VETQI a two side support. From one side he was appointed of overall quality management control, with deep analysis and suggestion of specific instruments to be adopted for project implementation. On the other one, he granted an holistic coherence of all VETQI project outcomes and EQAVET recommendations.

A key point for the overall quality of the project is an ongoing work made by the whole partnership throughout the Steering Committees (one for each WP). These frequent moment of confrontation and sharing revealed to be a fundamental part for the development of products and solving of occurred issues, such as specific context diversity and, in some cases, different approaches (coming from different professional experiences).

Dissemination is another key point for project approach and for its exploitation. The task has been carried out in several and effective ways but was always coordinated and shared among the partnership, with the goal of adapting efforts to different context.

The first method used for dissemination and engagement was an extensive use of online Dissemination, availing on frequent newsletter, web articles and social networks activities. (Twitter as principal, with #vetqi hashtag, Facebook and LinkedIn). The success of this core attention was demonstrated both from traffic sources for official web site and for participation of final users in testing phases and dissemination events. Of course the dissemination was also “physical” by the means of brochures, project presentations but one of the most successful activity was the launch of formal and informal events: presentation of the project and its activities into several events organized by the partners or in fairs related to training and ICT

sectors as well as other projects meeting but also the networking with selected stakeholders brought effective added value to the project. In this sense a lot of contributions for testing phases, project external review and overall networking, started thanks to these initiatives that were encouraged in the consortium since the start. There were also some criticism: it was easily found that no knowledge (or only partial) was existent in target groups regarding quality in training within European policies initiatives. This criticism was also worsened by the ongoing support from EQAVET Network at European level: in this sense not all National agencies were fully functioning. Due this aspect the partnership faced several problems in the dissemination phase (foreseen in the project proposal) for events and for sharing of information. Despite these aspects, VETQI project is trying to underline the positive effects for the whole wellness of European Union Economy (specially based on SMEs ICT) keeping also references for European policy such as EQAVET. On the other hand an added value to the project was the direct support of the Italian National Agency throughout the whole project and especially during the background research and the determination of indicators /parameters for basic certification system.

The good efforts achieved for dissemination led to a more satisfying approach related to exploitation. Once VETQI provided its outputs, the consortium agreed an exploitation ground. In particular, a specific strategy was created not only for the project lifetime but conceived also to perform its results in the future. This is based on registered VET QI TRADEMARKS AND CERTIFICATES and the recognized procedures for quality training process producing four products:

- o Vetqi Quality Label for VET and ICT SMEs
- o Vetqi Supporter for experts and stakeholders
- o Vetqi Quality Approved for VET and ICT SMEs
- o Vetqi process of quality approval for VET/SME certificates:

In order to get the maximum impact, the strategy for exploitation was focused to promote ICT small and medium sized enterprises and Vet providers, by using VETQI Quality Label.

The consortium decided to create a sort of network, called the VETQI Quality Label network, for enterprises and VET providers, supporting the quality assurance frameworks promoted by the project and the ideas behind it. The condition to access the network is a specific Statement of Compliance that legal representatives from VET providers and ICT SMEs have to sign and send to the consortium. In this statement of compliance they will state their "moral" obligation toward reaching the quality assurance standards that VETQI is promoting but also supporting the consortium and its further initiatives. The manuals and the guidelines linked to the Vetqi project, will help them as a reference. In order to extend the exploitation campaign, a specific part of the network is open for professionals, experts and stakeholders representatives interested in supporting the project and its objectives with the goal of creating a VETQI Supporter network.

The labelled users and supporter will have these benefits by entering in the network:

- Formal recognition from a pool of Experts regarding their approach in ICT and Training
- Access to future certification procedure
- Access to training courses built on VETQI Experience
- Involvement as panel experts in Events and Workshops held by VETQI Consortium
- Integration in other future initiatives (such as VETQI 2.0 projects)

A complementary theme for the project overall approach was given considering its perspectives beyond the end of co-financing period. The utilization of the selected web tool for example, offer the possibility to easily adapt the platform in its future application especially under a financial sustainability point of view.

The project concept will be linked with other economic sectors to promote the quality approach to other SMES. This can be done by adopting the resources used in order to improve the

method for stakeholders' involvement and create a sort of multiplier effects with other European projects and Networks. For this purpose some deeper collaboration started in the last part of the project.

The first one is with E-jobs Observatory (<http://e-jobs-observatory.eu/>): since the methods and the target groups are common. The second one is QALLL (<http://www.qalll.eu/>). In that case the common background of EQAVET and quality policies is declined in different ways (both in adult education and Vocational training) but the synergic connection between the working groups can play a relevant and interesting role focused to the quality procedures of the training approach. The last important issue is filling the gap on knowledge between the theoretical research in VET and the training done by the SMEs ICT companies: this can be applied only with a wide involvement of companies and institutional stakeholders

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The VETQI project achieved several important results, both tangible and intangible. The main tangible result is the achievement of a quality assurance system based on EQAVET and designed to improve effectiveness and monitoring training services supply for ICT SMEs fulfilling the objective of reducing the gap among VET offer and Training demand. This overall system is based on a web tool for pre-assessment, a series of guidelines designed for its target group. The background research – the first stone posed to build the entire architecture of the project - created a series of interesting outcomes, mainly dedicated to internal purpose such as Guideline plan: this document was designed with formal tools to be applied and addresses to be followed to approach target groups analysis complying to quality assurance reference framework for VET. The most important among these outcome is anyway a series of Target Group Indicators: these are the basis for assessment of quality assurance in training provided and were translated in the core element of the certification system and the web tool for assessment. In order to create a tool, which could be useful and suitable for project purposes, the basic questionnaire has been constructed through different steps. The partnership took into account these aspects:

- 1) Vocational training and its characteristics;
- 2) European quality assurance principles related to evaluation in training;
- 3) ICT market topics;
- 4) Training meaning according to SMEs and VET providers.
- 5) Quality Assurance standards (from EQAVET to ISO procedures)

High importance has been paid to the European quality assurance cycle and the reference frame has been identified in the quality assurance model defined by the EQAVET tool. The quality assurance model provides general indicators and descriptors for 4 main process phases, which are: planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation, review (procedures for changing). The reasons for applying such a tool answer to a request for:

- Providing a systemic approach to training quality assurance;
- Involving all the actors – stakeholders and target groups into the strategic decision process;
- Using the obtained feedback to move planning and implementation actions on a higher level.

The partnership tried to fill the gap by interviewing ICT experts to obtain a better addressing from ICT world (i.e. the problem of certification for ICT enterprises, ICT specific techniques for training, training tendencies within SMEs, ICT timetables for innovation) but also through the Peer review work. These indicators were then confronted with the market requirement during the long phase of contact with target users and, in particular, were deeply analysed through a “quality review” made by selected ICT SMES representative. The goal of this phase was to investigate deeply the EQAVET quality assurance criteria and their relevance toward market expectations. This brought a non-foreseen further engagement of 25 ICT enterprises. All these inputs finally led to the certification procedure as background architecture and they will also influenced the final guidelines. The impact of these product, is the complete analysis of training process that led all actors involved (from consortium to stakeholders and target groups representatives involved) to share and exchange ideas and best practises. This is an added value and a result that was constantly kept in consideration by project partners.

WEB QI TOOL was another tangible product. This tool was outlined keeping the same architecture of certification indicators in a user-friendly approach and conceived as a first moment of contact between target users and the whole project. The tool has its function in leading the user in a self-assessment procedure on vocational training received (for ICT SMES) or provided (for VET operators) and the related quality assurance aspects. A further analysis completed this work through audit and specific check. The web tool is now hosted by the University of Genova while during the project implementation was available on VETQI website. The web tool was tested in two phases leading also to achieve a series of results under a quantitative point of view. The pre-test phase of web tool as stated in VETQI project proposal worked on the gathering of information from 25 ICT SMES and 10 VET Providers from each country. The test had its main scope in a first deep evaluation of platform functioning. Users for the testing phase were contacted via direct contact (especially for Stakeholders) and via specific promotional activities as stated in External communication plan. VETQI received 161 responses from ICT SMES and 65 responses from VET operators, going beyond the required. The impact coming from this first moment of comparison with target groups was interesting and relevant. The pre-test report, available on VETQI website, summarizes the results of this phase giving also a series of interesting statistic data on contacted samples. This report was translated in all the languages touched by the project to extend the dissemination effects and the sharing of information, even if it was not specifically required at proposal stage. The following experimentation of detected models was the core of VETQI project. This phase lasted 8 months and was directed to a user group of 500 company ICT SMES and a selection of 25 VET providers per country. The task was achieved with a very limited delay (mainly due to the fact that the final phase of this involvement campaign was in full summer, when enterprises and VET providers are closed for holidays but it did not compromise the overall project implementation). Moreover, all partners gathered the required results except for Latvia where the context situation, is quite different from other countries: in the whole Latvia, ICT SMES companies which are in line with target groups are only 130. This, from one side allowed the partner to modify the target to be more in line with other countries but on the same time gave an added value to the project: involved enterprises were 52, almost the half of total number of companies tackled. The results from this interesting phase, presented in the Experimentation report, available on the official web site proved the functioning of platform and the possibility to use these criteria to determine quality assurance approach in the selected target groups.

The results from these activities were presented and discussed during QALLL and EQAVET network meetings (being the last one, the Sector Seminar for ICT in Berlin in October, where VETQI stood as a milestone in final conclusions). Experimentation report was translated in all the languages touched by the project to extend the dissemination effects and the sharing of information, even if it was not required.

The core of "training path" related to certification is a framework of documentation for VET operators and ICT SMES, namely the "Guidelines for quality assurance in training for ICT SMES". In particular, the Guidelines available on the website and on ADAM portal, were designed to help target group to pursue the correct approach vocational training availing on criteria and parameters for Quality Assurance detected during the project. The guidelines were available in two versions, in order to extend the dissemination. A concise version, available in 6 languages with the core of suggestions for VET and for ICT SMES plus an "extended version" available only in English, summarizing all the process related to the project and to these guidelines.

Another core and tangible result is the overall post-project architecture. The funding document is an overall and frequently updated exploitation plan that ruled the future activities of the

project as well as labels and the certification logo defined during project implementation and the functioning of promotion networks. This plan was also the ground on which the consortium created an internal agreement for exploitation of the project results. Beside this, registration of VETQI as European trademark was achieved. Supported by an experienced lawyer, the consortium registered the logo and, in a specific and supplementary internal agreement, signed by all participant (except for University of Genoa being a public body), they defined the shared property reference for utilization of this logo and a written engagement to promote the project and its outcomes in the future.

The VETQI consortium launched a specific quality network called “VETQI quality label” based on a Statement of compliance were target users of the project sign a moral obligation toward respecting the criteria and the parameters used for determination of certification system. This exploitation initiative was not originally foreseen in the project but it was conceived as a necessary step for project development in future. The Network was launched in early November (<http://www.vetqi.eu/en/page/news?read=83>) but it is interesting to see how many users joined it. (<http://www.vetqi.eu/en/page/labelled>). Moreover, as shown in the website, the VETQI consortium decided to officially recognize company and VET providers labelled by e-Jobs Observatory (<http://www.e-jobs-observatory.eu/>) as statement of compliance and, above all, values behind it, are common and complementary. This led to share the VETQI project with 53 users, now aware of the project and participating to it.

Still under a tangible point of view, the achievement of a wider participation in VET and ICT sectors community is one of the main results for the project. This outcome is in line with some of the most relevant VETQI the objectives:

- Foster exchange of best practices;
- Sharing of contents and methodology for experimentation phase with social partners, stakeholders and other VET providers;
- Creation of outputs in line with market expectations and design high-quality products.

This was the finalization of an ongoing campaign of stakeholders' engagement that featured also the creation of a peer reviewers network working at the development of the project and to its dissemination. Stakeholders were contacted using local events, direct networking and of course the project dissemination. The peer review phase started in late December 2012 with the engagement of:

- Two experts for peer-review phase in Training Activities (Associazione FORMA.Azione Srl and Ciofs)
- An European association of ICT enterprises (PIN SMES),
- One Trade Unions (CISL Liguria).
- Experts coming from Certification sector (Dekra Academie)
- ECF/CEN experts (EMF http://www.emfs.eu/about_EMF).

Their main tasks were an overall evaluation of the project products, an evaluation of internal processes and a support in testing phase and targets involvement.

Among the results achieved by this peer review model the first one was the fine tuning for all outputs created but also a tangible and effective contribution for project's exploitation in the future.

Dissemination is another milestone in project overall achievements. The dissemination was launched shortly after the start of the kick off meeting with the goal of create awareness raising

on project activities but also to extending the potential impact of its outcomes. Moreover, as explained above, it was also conceived as a key address to involve stakeholders and potential users to influence the creation of outputs in a more market oriented approach. Among the tangible products of the project , the website (Link: www.vetqi.eu) was the starting point for dissemination: it's a user-friendly site for Vet providers, SMES and Stakeholders; it received during his life 1739 visits from 1394 different visitors and the average of pages viewed by visitors is rather high with - 4.5 pages/visit, with 1.24 minutes average by page. The traffic source analysis led to interesting results because it showed as the main starting point for reaching VETQI were from twitter (t.co/xxxxx) links, Adam portal, as well as news articles issued. In line with the web site approach, another source of outcomes for dissemination results was an extensive Online Dissemination Campaign. All the consortium was engaged in disseminating the project progresses and outcomes using web magazines, specific newsletter and news alert but also social media. The overall campaign was conceived as flexible and context oriented. For example, 6 specific newsletters were launched through ENTER Network (www.enter-network.eu) reaching up to 400 average users for each publishing. This led also to the publication of more than 50 web-articles, news, paper publications and presentations in all the countries involved. Social media campaign was done via Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. The main source used for dissemination is Twitter, where all the partners are registered. All these tools were used to boost dissemination of project activities but also, especially for Twitter, to involve stakeholders and key expert in sharing ideas and thoughts on project outcomes. Dissemination events were another key element of project success. As established in project proposal partners has to be involved in events at local and international level to promote and share the project. The partners were then engaged to host local events but also to take part in international conferences, fairs related to VET and ICT and other events. The consortium organized 14 small events gathering more than 200 participant in total (mainly from VET and ICT sectors). Moreover, VETQI was presented and shared in 18 events such as conferences, fairs, seminars and networking events. Among the more relevant VETQI was presented in

- QALLL – Final conference November 2012
- Seminar “ECVET as a support tool for lifelong learning” - Latvian Education Development Agency, May 2013
- Greta Bretagne Sud Conference (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmwGstynnv0>) June 2013
- SMI – Congress of Young IT Scientists Międzyzdroje (Poland) September 2013
- EQAVET Ict Sectorial seminar October 2013
- International Quality Conference – Riga (LV) November 2013
- E- skills conference Brussels (financed by own resources) December 2013

The project was officially presented with all its outcomes in a final conference held in Genova in November 2013. The conference was followed by more than 50 people – mainly stakeholders at local and national level, ICT SMEs representatives and VET operators. The conference saw the direct participation of experts involved in peer review phase and it was conceived not only as a showcase of project results and exploitation channels but also as a moment of sharing and networking. All video are available on For SAS'youtube channel. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBgBgUv9Lq3URkoXUZcz4QA>)

In conclusion, the dissemination was more than satisfying as in every country touched by the project a large number of activities were launched. The success can measured out for example

by the fact that the consortium managed to achieve the participation of enterprises and VET providers fulfilling the ambitious targets established in the project's proposal, but also in their participation to Exploitation campaign. The impact of this effort was a real contribution, especially for target groups in their awareness of vocational training as fundamental gear for development but it was also the first step to a needed holistic approach toward quality assurance training in ICT sector open to all stakeholders and players at European level. In this sense, what is really interesting and an effective outcome of VETQI is the detection of a needed future address for Vocational training in ICT: there is a strong need to keep EQAVET and e-CF together, trying to influence the provision of training not only for its content but also for its overall assurance procedure. This could really contrast the gap between ICT sector and Training offer and it's the natural future development for VETQI. Moreover, it was easily understandable how necessary is an ongoing confrontation among key actors in these fields involving also bodies and organizations that rule vocational training at local and national level. Results from this confrontation could be a key factor to overcome market rigidity and vocational training rigidity and, above all, could create the background for a new economic development of ICT SMEs – driving wheel of European Economy.

The overall management and quality assurance control in project implementation were points of internal success. While the management of project activities run very smoothly – thanks to a good partnership spirit in the consortium – and all possible criticism were tackled in due time, the overall evaluation of the project was managed following four main points:

- Quality assurance plan and tasks monitoring resources: internal resources used to assess the ongoing state of art of the project, with different and frequent instruments for reporting the project implementation, its quality and the cooperation and the feelings among the partnership
- Steering committees: every partner (represented by one member) attend to monthly Steering Committees in order to discuss issues dealing with project,
- Presence of External Expert: the external expert Giorgio Allulli helped the project to be in line with European Policies and to satisfy the requirement for a high standard quality of deliverables and activities.
- Further and deep evaluation on procedures and products by other peer reviewers and external experts granting high quality and a wide spectrum of influences coming from different sources.

4. Partnerships

VETQI partnership featured different types of institutions with specific attitudes and work styles granted important benefit from each other.

The different countries, contexts and status of partners involved in the project were a point of strength for the transferability of project results, because they brought different experiences – related to ICT and Small and medium enterprises but also because they offer their network to share project development.

The consortium, made by 5 member states represented some of the liveliest countries for ICT SMES so results from this project are particularly relevant. The establishment of a future new consortium, based on a specific agreement for project promotion will allow a certain contribute to the fulfilment of the European policies and will also match the real needs for the quality improvement of the training supplied utilized by European enterprises. The overall partnership experience was satisfying. A fair distribution of work and responsibilities was guaranteed in the consortium to achieve a great efficiency in the management. The roles were determined on the basis of partners' competences. Every partner was responsible for at least one work package, granting a full participation - interest – and balanced share of responsibilities in the project. Some partners could rely on high standard experience in European projects and other contribute with important knowledge and experiences. This guaranteed a EU wide value of the project. The partners have also a direct experience and knowledge of the topics related to the project. In particular they worked closely with both the target group involved - VET Providers (some of them e.g... EUROFORTIS, IPF and FOR SAS are VET providers themselves) and ICT SMEs are often (as in case of FOR SAS) their main customers. Moreover, the good spirit in the consortium led also to co-managed tasks even in case these were not foreseen in the original project. It's the case of web site where MPS (as dissemination leader) and Eurofortis (website contact point) shared ideas and initiatives to improve the functioning of overall dissemination, University of Genova hosted the final version of web tools in its servers or in case of WSBINOZ that, although not required, contributed significantly to the review and the assessment of experimentation phase.

Internal communication was monitored throughout the whole project: each participant has been encouraged to express his/her opinion related to positive and negative aspects of the group rhythm and working load. To do so emails, Skype meetings, phone calls, “warning messages” brainstorming during personal meetings and also one small role play have been carried out. Apart from this, internal climate was always more than satisfying as proven during face to face meeting where each issue was tackled and solved together and different points of view were smoothly combined, increasing the value of project products. Moreover, recalling the importance and the responsibility toward a public funding has become a refrain in the project. The partnership was in fact constantly reminded about the public duties this project represent .The selection of the different partners for different Work packages, referring to their proper background, had its main result in giving successful feedbacks for every activity made during the project. This granted also that each partner is capitalizing on its own existing network in order to engage actively stakeholders that are contributing as external “precious supporter ” of the project, giving feedbacks, suggestions and showing critic ties that might rise up. In that way the consortium was able to involve actively relevant stakeholders in project development such as enterprises association at local, national and European levels (such as PIN SME or Confindustria for Italy), relevant experts in training, Ict sector and certifications for peer reviewing of the project. The final result is a ongoing growing network for project promotion and exploitation

5. Plans for the Future

The project established precise future plans. The first step was the creation and the registration of the VETQI trademark by November 2013. The registration is granted for 10 years and it will be on charge of For SAS. A specific internal agreement for project exploitation and regulation in VETQI and its trademark use was created availing also on the support of an experience lawyer. The goal of this agreement is to establish a common and shared path for the development of project's outputs in the future, but also for the definition of borders for Registered Trademarks utilization. The certification procedure – which is now fully functioning – can be applied to the market starting from partners' initiatives but, as detected during the project implementation, could be easily implemented in other economic sector. VETQI's future is depending also on network maintenance: actually there are 53 Vet providers and ICT SMEs under this network and they are potential customers for the VETQI offer. Moreover, VETQI quality label network is based on the necessity of keep it active and lively and not only a collection of entities. The communications made so far should be transferred in something more concrete and, in this sense, a series of initiatives will be launched. The first one is a newsletter/dissemination campaign for promoting the participation of enterprises and VET in joint initiatives. Moreover, in accordance with e-JOBs observatory publication of dissemination materials are expected. The maintenance of this activity will be partially managed via social networks, keeping it costs in an affordable means. Website and its management is now on charge of For SAS even under a financial point of view. Another source of post project development is the implementing of the experimentation looking at training outcomes and resources. In this sense, the creation of a necessary training process to train and select audit operators in order to fulfil the correct procedures for the certification is under study. This of course is part of the post project agreement and it has to be replicated in all involved countries. Moreover, procedures designed on VETQI process and certification are already used by For SAS as a vet operators, in its normal day-to-day activities. Under a financial point of view, there are two possible solutions for managing and running these trainings. The first one is a fee based training, to be held in each countries by each partner were possible, availing also on the internal agreement signed. The second solution is the development of training resources and provision under next Erasmus + programme. Elaboration of materials is now under For SAS responsibility and engagement. The second step is the opening to different networks of stakeholders. The project partnership and the related networks are going to create the condition for sharing as wide as possible the project principles at European level. The first possibility is the development of VETQI outcomes going beyond the simple EQAVET and quality assurance frameworks, trying to incorporate contents requirement coming from e-CF. This new way for developing and exploiting project outcomes was presented in occasion of the EQAVET ICT Sectorial seminar in Berlin (October 2013) and it is focused on a connection with EQF and e-CF.. In this sense the next steps will be involvement of strategic stakeholders for quality assurance in the ICT sectors, and other relevant representative entities. We refer to

- CEN and ECF and EQAVET: VETQI represents a certain added value to e-CF work
- DAE and the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs: initiatives related to VETQI project must be presented by the consortium to these stakeholders in order to get support for further development. VETQI was already mentioned in a Pledge for Grand Coalition written by For SAS in 2013.
- UNI – ISO certification bodies: the certification procedures and its resources will be presented to exploit possible commercialisation. In this sense, the internal agreement already establish the possibility to review it in case of commercialization of project outcomes.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The VETQI project with its outputs contributed actively to European policies and in particular to Lifelong Learning program objectives. The project coherently follows the objective of development of quality and performances in lifelong learning at European level, since it determined innovative methodological procedures –the certification procedures - integrating quality policies to be implemented directly in VET operators, as they work with ICT SMEs. The basis for this quality integration is granted by the implementation in this system of EQAVET principles as well as quality assurance references and specific needs detected by the market. Moreover, another key issue tackled by the project is the improvement of accessibility and quality of opportunities related to vocational training – a common objective for LLP and VETQI project. The approach and the concrete contribution in this field is to insert discussion and market's dynamics related to quality in training within the functional and relevant point of view referred to small and medium enterprises, that should be considered more on a practical point of view in quality assurance evaluation. This so relevant contribution is valuable by considering the low percentage of projects dealing with quality training in small and medium enterprises approved in recent calls for Leonardo Da Vinci sub program but also by the clear perception of market players: especially for actors such as VET providers, training programs and initiatives (even at national level) are not fitting for SMEs' necessities. This is also witnessed by the invitation of VETQI in the QALLL network's experts panel and subsequently in EQAVET network meetings, where it was clear that VETQI was one of the few projects dealing with training quality: the focus of the project is innovative because it is not only on trainees and training, but also in the effective involvement of SMES in this approach. In this sense, this is a total bottom up approach. But why is it important this kind of involvement? SMES are one of the core element of European Union Economy. Vocational training is a powerful weapon in the hands of enterprises as they are facing an overall crisis and a global competition, where updating and knowledge are key factors their existence. The ongoing confrontation with enterprises, vet operators (as they are the operational provider of training for entities that could not afford on large internal organizational procedures and resources), stakeholders dealing with them (for example national organization for training in enterprises, chambers of commerce, universities, etc.) is enriching the design.

As a further relevant key point, quality assurance was analysed from a different point of view. This lead to new interesting points that must be taken in account for evaluating the quality and the effective effects of training not only in trainees but in its indirect positive effects on occupation and in economic growth. By the means of a continuous confrontation, vocational training could be more performing and respondent to its final users. In this sense, being in line with Leonardo Da Vinci objectives - VET QI project by working on direct application of EU quality policies, support users in acquiring skills, knowledge and quality as promoted by VET providers' performances at European level. This will lead to a double positive effect, working on personal development of workers but also on improvement of enterprises undertaking quality training processes. Another important effect is the fact that some relevant approach and ideas are now disseminated and spread to small and medium enterprises and Vet operators at European level, such as

- The importance to program Training processes,
- The peer review as a relevant tool for analysing,
- comparing and assess the approaches as done by enterprises.

The VETQI certification procedures and the related framework of documentation promoted the improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training (Leonardo Da

Vinci Objective). The innovative aspect is the fact that the overall approach is bottom up trying to translate training references given from the market with EQAVET principles. This is also totally in line with Education and Training 2020 Work Programme - 2th strategic objective – that define the improvement of quality and efficiency in education and training as “crucial for Europe's success and for enhancing employability”. Nevertheless, it exploit also best practices and specific context references. The final results of these efforts are tangible and functioning to influence quality assurance approach in training for final users and, to a wider extent, even stakeholders policies. VETQI worked also on the development of shared initiatives for transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences, by promoting debates on how to implement e-CF/EQF contents with quality assurance parameters of EQAVET – a discussion that was even more relevant in later stage of the project when specific experts in e-CF were involved. In this sense, the solution that seems to be emerging is once again a bottom up approach – where market's needs and key players should be the starting point. The produced outputs have effectively received the benefits of this wide sharing approach, and they could really tackle a series of issues coming across the market in these days. In particular, the possibility to avail on a certification related to training in ICT Sector can really help from one side VET providers to promote itself as effective tool for provision of training and, from the other side, Companies in selecting a VET operators that can really satisfy its need in the light of a recognized quality assurance approach. It is also to be said how a certification for ICT companies can be relevant when confronting with larger market key players because it prove the efficiency in training that is more than necessary for a modern and competitive company. VETQI in its future can play a good role also toward the matching of EQAVET with e-CF and CEN being a starting good practice to try extending the already achieved bottom up approach related to EQAVET and mix it with e-CF: the possible line is really the definition of training paths fully referent to European Training frameworks. Always related to best practices promotion, VETQI was able to stress the importance of issues that are related to Quality training, promoted in other European initiatives, such as the relevance of Soft Skills in workers or the organisational climate.

VETQI with its results is contributing to other key policies at European level. In particular, Lisbon Strategy and its review in 2005 by developing training quality as a proactive factor for Economic development as well as – in its indirect effect- the improvement of workers: the definition of shared and recognized standard for training in ICT – one of the main sector of European economic system – designed also to be more market oriented than national initiatives. This is a key for improvement of knowledge applied. In this sense, the project is fully promoting the European policies linked to enterprises development such as Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme but also Enterprise Europe Network as some of their members were contacted during the project.

Finally, VETQI supported the Bologna process for it defined quality assurance references applied to a specific sector – ICT – valuable for all European context but above helped to promote the EQAVET framework at local level: the research, the tests but also the direct contact with enterprises, vet operators and even stakeholders, showed that all the members belonging to such groups are not always aware of the existence of EQAVET and its related policies. The main project goal is not the dissemination of EQAVET and its policies but it became a structural necessity while the project was under implementation. The partial absence of a EQAVET network offices in all the Countries involved in the project, brought the partnership to some difficulties, not only for dissemination (as the direct contact with such network was foreseen in the project's form and, above all, would have been a relevant instrument for spreading project and results to a larger group of potential users and stakeholders) but also for the testing of resources provided by VETQI.

The project's difficulties can represent the real need for the development of initiative like EQAVET network not only for merely project success but also to help the final user (i.e. vet operator and enterprises) in understanding how important is Europe and how it can positively affects the life of enterprise and its workers. The whole picture, as described here is confirmed by the analysis presented by the QALLL meeting in Vienna in November 2012, where For SAS - representing VETQI project- attended (invited by ISFOL – Italian National Institute for vocational training). The comparison, with other similar experiences , QALLL projects and with experts involved, stated that it is strictly needed a wider and deeper attention for small and medium enterprises and for vocational training quality. The same can be said within last EQAVET Sectorial Seminar on ICT in Berlin (October 2013) where VETQI was regarded as one of the most innovative project dealing with training in small and medium context

7. Extra Heading/Section

N.a.

