

QALEP impacts and transfer of innovation – through the eyes of the European partners

The QALEP project is the true reflection of the commitment and the efforts of the French Education Government to implement the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)¹ by aligning the existing French national education framework for VET with the European quality assurance principles for VET.

Recently in France the local level of action in VET is growing although the country is known for its centralized system. The development of institutional autonomy with the school project and the contract related objectives with the local authority requires the implementation of a quality assurance mechanism that could provide an insight and information on what is going on in the VET schools and to what extent the schools meet the national objectives and targets. Self-assessment / self-evaluation can be considered as the most effective methodological tool for quality assurance to achieve these goals.

What is a VET school self-assessment and why to implement it?

VET school self-assessment is a way to improve the VET school as an organization: it is a process to improve the quality of VET and particularly the quality of training provision, it helps schools in analyzing the challenges they face, it helps the school planning process, and potentially it turns the VET school into learning organization. The first and maybe the most important feature of VET schools self-assessment is the fact that it is based on dialogue among all school staff, but also on dialogue with the community and different actors responsible in the VET system. The second important feature of VET school self-assessment is the fact that apart from planning that leads to implementation, self-assessment incorporates the review process on all internal procedures thus being an essential tool in establishing an effective VET institution development / improvement cycle.

In line with the above, self-assessment can be defined as a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of the organisation's activities and results referenced against pre-defined criteria; a way to improve the quality of VET provision and the VET institution as an organization. In the process of self-assessment the VET institutions identify clearly their strengths and the areas for improvement, analyse the challenges they face and based on that, elaborate and implement improvement actions. Self-assessment results in verifiable improved students'

¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (2009/C 155/01). Online: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc1134_en.htm

achievements, better school leadership, improved accountability, and improved satisfaction of the labour market, etc. It is probably the most important and most frequently used instrument that promotes a culture of change and continuous improvement in VET institutions.

The **main aim of the QALEP Project** is / was to develop the criteria and process of self-assessment in the French VET schools accredited with the school label trade “Lycée des Métiers” through consistent national framework and the existing European Reference Framework for quality assurance, namely

- to identify the criteria and the requirements for the implementation of the process of self-assessment.
- to define the organization and processes of self-assessment.
- to involve the inspection, external audit and labelling process as an approach to external evaluation.

Three European partners leading self-evaluation initiatives in the VET field supported and contributed the development of the self-evaluation approach in French VET Schools by presenting and sharing their expertise and experiences. These European partners are:

- Austria: ARQA-VET Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET.
- Hungary: Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Behaviour Science and Communication Theory, Observatory for Educational Development and M&S Consulting Kft. (providing external expertise).
- Romania: CNDIPT Centrul National de Dezvoltare A Invatamantului Profesional Si Tehnic.

The European partners in the QALEP Project are all members of the EQAVET Network, two of them act also as the members of the Network’s Steering Committee, and have lead innovative practices in the area of self-assessment in VET schools. All the three countries have already aligned their national VET quality assurance systems with the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and the indicators of the EQAVET Framework. Their experience with EQAVET allowed the French partner to adapt and transfer the good practices of self-assessment in VET schools throughout the project development and implementation process.

The contribution of the European partners

As a Transfer of Innovation project, on one hand the QALEP imported innovation from the European project partners. The listing below presents the many of the areas where the European partners brought in external expertise – by disseminating good practices, participating in the elaboration of products (Specification Book, Self-assessment Guide, Training plan), providing perspectives on the methodology, following-up and evaluating the piloting phase and its results – despite the very different ways in which the education systems in Austria, Romania, Hungary and France are organised.

Examples: How did the European partners contribute – by transferring their knowledge and experiences in the field of VET school quality assurance and especially self-assessment – to achieving the project aims?

- ***The Austrian contribution included***

- A lot of experiences with self-evaluation.
- Challenges and obstacles while implementing self-evaluation.
- How can the teachers be brought „on board“?
- The point of view of the students.
- Is there a „quality culture“?
- To find equilibrium between a top-down and a bottom-up approach.
- QIBB is a multi-level system of quality assurance: schools – inspectorates – ministry.

- ***The Hungarian contribution included***

- A decade+ work on quality assurance in VET – self-assessment-based quality improvement (experience, results, lessons learnt).
- Development and implementation of an EQAVET compatible Common VET Quality Management Framework:
 - Process control, description of common processes.
 - Surveying partners' needs and satisfaction.
 - Common VET indicator system.
 - Common Self-assessment Model for VET.
- Professional supporting environment:
 - VET specific, 3-phase self-assessment model.
 - Self-assessment methodology, Implementation Guide.
 - Methodological guidance materials.
 - Training courses in self-assessment (for teachers, trainers).
 - Benchmarking database.
 - Quality Award scheme.
 - School networks for sharing, mutual learning.
- Hungarian in-service teacher training system with a quality-focussed accreditation scheme of training programs.

- ***The Romanian contribution included***

- Presentation of the development and operationalisation of the quality assurance and improvement mechanisms at system level as a transversal process that has to be holistically approached.

- Mechanisms used to customize EQAVET, which is a meta framework to address national realities, through the development of the Romanian National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) for initial VET.
- Integrating quality assurance mechanisms in the national education and training strategy and development of the quality assurance mechanisms for the entire Romanian education and training system.
- Using CQAF/EQAVET principles in the Romanian Law for quality assurance in education and training:
 - results-orientation.
 - emphasis on self assessment.
 - promotion of continuous improvement of education and training.
 - protection of the interests of the education beneficiaries (first of all students' and employers' interests).
 - promotion of the development of a quality culture.
- Assuring ownership among all relevant actors.
- Allocation of clear responsibilities and involvement of all parties (national authorities, local communities, school inspectorates, VET providers) together with support measures to enable them to understand the role of the different quality assurance components and use the manuals/guidebooks (training programmes on quality assurance developed and implemented for the key actors, methodological support for the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms, dissemination of good practice).

Transfer of innovation

On the other hand, the QALEP Project developed a number of **innovative practices** which help the monitoring and evaluation of the improvement in the effectiveness of quality assurance in French VET secondary schools in the areas of learning/training provision and quality management practices. The European partners can also take advantage of these solutions, practices, project products and the French experiences to implement the EQAVET principles to further develop and improve their own VET and VET quality assurance – self-assessment systems. In the following we summarise the main learning points of the QALEP Project from the point of view of the European partners.

- **What Austria can learn from QALEP?**

As the Austrian Quality Initiative for VET schools and colleges (QIBB: www.qibb.at) also focused on schools' self-evaluation at an early stage, it was of special interest to us to see how the same goal is approached in a very different way in the French context. In our opinion it was quite impressive how the Self-evaluation Guide was developed and the way stakeholders were involved in the developmental process of the indicators.

The Austrian potential to learn from the QALEP Project includes:

- Finding indicators for different aspects of school life.
- Improving our own set of indicators with regard to the self-evaluation tool.
- Learning from the French experiences with this kind of self-evaluation (based on indicators only).

What Austria can learn from the French project is how to develop a broad set of indicators at school level, which could be useful for monitoring schools' performance – although the term “self-evaluation” is connoted quite differently in the Austrian system compared to France.

- How to organise the project and the developmental process?
- The responsibility of the hierarchy in QALEP: to set clear goals and structure the process.

From the QALEP Project we can also learn how hierarchical structures can be used to set up an all-encompassing process of introducing a quality management instrument at system level. The goals and the structure of the process seemed extraordinarily clear to us. As partner in QALEP Project we will follow the future development of the French experience with the implementation of self-evaluation with great interest. Keeping in mind that the function of self-evaluation from our perspective is to support schools' organisational development and as the core of it the improvement of the teaching-learning-process we are interested in the exchange of experiences how this goal can be achieved through different approaches.

- Schools as a social place with much more tasks than „only teaching and learning“.

Moreover through the QALEP Project we learned to appreciate the French view of schools as social places that are integrated in societal structures and have to be seen as more than “only” places for teaching and learning. Of course this is also the case in Austria but what we can learn from France is to try to find indicators for different aspects of school life beyond the core competence of teaching and learning.

- **What Hungary can learn from QALEP?**

In Hungary since the government change in 2010 the complex restructuring of the education system as a whole is underway involving all sectors of education and training – general/public education, vocational education and training, higher education. The French experiences and the QALEP results can inform to a large extent the ongoing developments in the Hungarian school system.

1. QALEP results to inform the ongoing developments in the Hungarian school system

- Self-assessment in a centralized school system (role, aims, responsibilities).

One of the main changes was the change in the ownership of schools: from January 1st 2013 all schools became under the central (professional) responsibility of the state instead of belonging to local municipalities.

According to the new Act on Public Education „*The headmaster has to prepare, based on the public criteria, the self-assessment of the school which has to be approved by the teaching staff.*” (150§, (4)) This means that institutional self-evaluation remains in the focus of attention in the newly developed system, too. As Hungary has had a decentralized school system before the question arises here: how self-assessment can / should be organised in a centralized school system? The experience of France gained in the QALEP Project can be helpful in answering this question.

- Development and implementation of the newly established school inspection system.
 - Role of self-assessment.
 - (Changed) role of inspectors.
 - Criteria (fields and sheets) and indicators used.
 - Training program for inspectors in quality assurance and self-assessment.

In the frame of the restructuring, new approaches to quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of public and VET institutions are being developed and piloted. Within a large-scale, EU funded project titled “Quality improvement in public education” managed by the Hungarian Educational Authority a standardised external evaluation system which has been absent from the Hungarian public education since 1985 will be (re-)introduced (Pillar 2: *Self-evaluation of schools and uniform external evaluation system of institutions and teachers’ work*; Duration: July 2012 – June 2014).

A group of experts – representing the various levels of public education: nursery-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, secondary vocational training schools, art schools, student hostels and special education schools – developed the standards of external evaluation (inspectorate) for teachers, school leaders and schools. The standards (criteria) and tools (procedures, questionnaires, evaluation forms etc.) were tested in 52 schools and the standards revised accordingly.

Before the development process started, the role, organisation, tasks, activities of inspectorates working in different European countries – including France – were studied by the expert team members. We knew the General Inspection of National Education (IGEN) from our cooperation within the QALEP Project. The information received from the French project partners about the IGEN’s and the inspectors functions (like monitoring the personnel, inspecting and assessing their activities, advising them, permanently following-up the teaching, teaching content, teaching methods, procedures etc.) was especially helpful to us when drawing the standards for the evaluation of the teacher’s professional work.

Forty experts will be trained to perform as trainers of inspectors (ITT programme). The training of inspectors (1000 persons as the first lot) will take place in autumn 2013. In the period from January 2014 to June 2014 further inspectors will be trained, the total number of the trained inspectors will make approximately 4000 persons.

The experiences with "Training plan" – which intends to design training modules for national education administrative and supervisory staff as well as school managers – can be used here. The training content, the experiences of the training designing and developing process, the organisation and administering of this large-scale training would be of interest to us.

In the course of the pedagogical-professional evaluation the inspectors will rely on and use the results coming from the internal evaluations of the school such as the institution-wide self-evaluation, performance evaluation of teachers, the national competency assessment of students, surveying the satisfaction of parents and teachers as well as other partners of the school, evaluation of the effectiveness of managing the school organisation and the pedagogical work etc. Based on the results of the external evaluation, the headmaster of the school has to elaborate a 5-year action plan setting the tasks to improve the pedagogical-professional work of the institution.

Meanwhile, the system of self-evaluation is being developed in close relation with the school external evaluation and with the standards of quality improvement in schools. The first version of the self-evaluation standards and tools will be developed in autumn 2013 and will be tested in the same 52 schools. The finalised version of self-evaluation system is expected by the end of 2013, so in January 2014 – along with the external evaluation – it can be launched system-wide.

Here the lesson we can learn is: How to ensure the complementarity between internal (self-)evaluation and external evaluation lead by the Inspectorate? Will the role of the inspectors change (and if yes, how?) in the self-assessment exercise / process? Studying the role of the inspectors in supporting (VET school) self-assessment can be used in the newly evolving inspection system in Hungary.

- **Restructuring the practical (apprenticeship) training.**
 - **Criteria (questions) and general indicators for (self-)evaluation of in-company training periods.**

The new VET government has restructured the Hungarian VET and adult training system with the aim of better serving the needs of the labour market/economy and increasing the attractiveness of VET. It is acknowledging the strategic role of VET and elaborated the legislative support needed. A VET Concept Paper and new pieces of legislation (e.g. new Act on VET, on Adult Training, on the renewed National Qualifications Register) were adopted.

The policy objectives and the (planned) actions of the new VET governance include

- increase the duration of practical training,
- better support the vocations in short supply,
- reduce the time period of training,
- simplify the examination requirements,

- further support apprenticeship training,
- develop external evaluation / inspection system in VET.

The restructuring applies also to practical training where a special Hungarian dual system was developed and introduced with vocational theory in school and with increased duration of the practical training at external training sites – companies, enterprises. The aim is to strengthen the apprenticeship training based on a student contract concluded between the student and the enterprise. The system – after a trial period of one academic year – became compulsory as from September 1st 2013.

The sheets nr. 15. (Training periods in the workplace, placements, periods in businesses (various forms of apprenticeship and alternance training) and nr. 21. Partnerships in the QALEP Self-assessment Guide can help to extend the Common VET Self-assessment Model with additional criteria related to quality assurance and evaluation of work-based learning.

2. Strong relationship, compliance and clear link of the themes and the national objectives.
3. Enriching the Hungarian Common VET Self-assessment Model with new aspects like Lycée life, Organisation of school time, Technological cooperation, Accreditation of prior experience and the related indicators.
4. Training program for and large-scale training of the VET schools' management staff in quality assurance and self-assessment.
5. Establishing a label for VET schools to certify the compliance with certain quality criteria in line with EQAVET principles.

- **What Romania can learn from QALEP?**

- How to set up an excellent data based indicators' system that encompasses all the major aspects of the initial VET provision?

We have learned from the QALEP Project that a coherent statistical data base for the key performance indicators can be extremely useful and supportive for schools in setting standards according to national objectives of the overall VET system and in taking steps to maintain, measure, review, and improve these standards. Romania so far has developed the first strand of the EQAVET by implementing the quality assurance mechanisms, and considerable progress has been made in setting up external monitoring procedures. However, the third strand of the EQAVET still needs to be further improved. A national discussion needs to take place as to what mechanisms should be developed to ensure consistency of VET provision and services across different sectors, different regions and different providers. It is important to identify appropriate mechanisms on national level that allow for collecting and analysing relevant data and would help in gaining insight into the quality of VET provision and services in Romania. In this respect, the QALEP developments are of crucial importance.

- The role and importance of School life and climate, especially regarding:

- Students' involvement in school's life.
- Parents' participation in school's life.
- Prevention of absenteeism and of drop out.
- Application of school rules.
- Health education (Health and Civic Education, education actions related to: sexuality, nutritional health, work-related risks, and addictions).
- Cultural openness (artistic and cultural policy and cultural openness form part of the School Project).

Romania has learned from the QALEP Project the increasing importance of school life and climate in improving the quality of its provision. We have learned that excellent schools are improving the quality of learning by enlarging their perspective, encompassing the artistic and cultural dimension, via an active involvement of students and parents in the school's life. Being aware of these aspects due to the QALEP project, we will include in the revision of our quality assurance approach these important aspects.

- **The importance of setting clear objectives and responsibilities at project level.**

We have learned from the QALEP Project that a shared vision doesn't come easily. There are usually different views and interests across groups of stakeholders (inspectors, teachers and support staff, students and parents, other professionals and key members of the community). To develop a shared vision, it is crucial to engage with all of these stakeholders in clarifying and agreeing the values and principles. It also has to be commonly agreed how these values and principles will influence all aspects of the work, the curriculum, the teaching and learning processes, the ethos of the school and the way that everyone is included and how they relate to each other. At both system and school level, achieving a common vision and sharing the same values are of crucial importance.

The impacts of the QALEP Project

The QALEP project has also several impacts both on national and European levels.

On national level:

- The QALEP Project has developed a strong commitment of France to implement the EQAVET Framework on national level and resulted in their increased participation in the European cooperation.
- The project will definitely give a boost to the self-evaluation process in the French vocational and training education establishments, primarily in VET secondary school with the "Lycée des métiers" label.
- In the self-assessment approach developed under the guidance and promoted by DGESCO the criteria and indicators used are drawn up especially for VET and also linked with EQAVET. This way the practices of self-assessment used in French schools in recent years can be made VET specific and in this process they can get acquainted also with the European principles of quality assurance in VET.

- The QALEP developments will definitely have an impact and (slightly?) change the role of the Inspectorate bodies and the inspectors in the school development process.
- The tools developed in the project will foster the autonomy of schools
- The success of the QALEP initiatives can be the starting point of a broader development of the quality assurance mechanisms for the entire French education system, enlarging the perspective and enriching the initial scope.

In European dimension, the QALEP Project can provide a good practice example to other European countries on

- how to implement the EQAVET Framework in a centralized school system?
- how to (re-)introduce a VET school self-assessment system in accordance with the EQAVET Framework in a system with a long-tradition and strong external evaluation system (Inspection body)? How can they coexist and interact?
- how to build on the existing practices when implementing the EQAVET Framework on national level?
- how to develop, implement and monitor a quality assurance / self-assessment / self-monitoring approach based on a broad set of indicators at school level?
- how to organise and manage a large scale national training plan involving 1600 VET schools in order to raise their awareness of and make them acquire the knowledge and methodology as well as to ensure their ownership of the (European) principles of VET quality assurance and self-assessment?
- how a quality label applied on national level can be brought in line with the EQAVET Framework / quality criteria?
- how to use the EQAVET Framework and also an EU Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) project to support the implementation of national aims and objectives?
- how to turn an EU LdV project into a national project (follow-up activities on national level)?

On bi- or trilateral level we hope that through the cooperation of Austria, Hungary and Romania with France within the QALEP Project there have been built strong institutional and personal links that will also feed into better understanding of the different systems and to future cooperation and common projects.

We wish every success to the French VET schools on their quality journey to implement VET school self-assessment and thus to achieve VET Excellence!

For the European partners of the QALEP Project,

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