**Towards a Reciprocal Recognition
of Quality Assurance Systems in VET for Tourism**

Adriana Şerban, *Editor*
Silvia Irimiea, *Assistant Editor*

Guide for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training for Tourism

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Guide for Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training
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Contents

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Towards a Common Recognition of Quality Assurance Systems in VET for Tourism (QualVET)

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Silvia Irimiea
Adriana Șerban

T he project *Towards a common recognition of quality assu– rance systems in VET for Tourism (QualVET)* has been undertaken by the Centre for Tourism Training (Babeş-Bolyai University) as a coordinating partner for the purpose of carry– ing through the quality assurance reform in VET (Vocational Education and Training) for tourism, a reform that the insti– tution has committed itself to implement. Quality assurance has become a major concern of training providers in Romania, since VET has acquired a greater prominence as a training alternative to academic training. It is also thought that such a significant process must involve the Romanian vocational training provider in an international exchange of expertise and experience which can enhance a better understanding of quality assurance in general and the mechanisms used in other countries. To ensure the fulfilment of this purpose at local and regional level, the CTT has drawn in the project the

National Authority for Qualifications as a silent partner, an organisation which is in charge with vocational accreditation. In addition, the international collaboration will enhance the partners' mutual recognition of the learners' competences in the field of tourism training.

The partner institutions are training providing institutions equally interested in raising the level of tourism training and contributing thereby to the reciprocal recognition of compe–tences, given that tourism is a demanding and changing sector in which the work force is extremely mobile.

Project Summary

The project sought to establish a quality assurance mechanism aimed at improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism education and training in Europe. The mechanism involves: identifying quality standards for tourism education and training, improving pedagogic efficiency in tourism training and is expected to contribute to establishing a standardized and constant level of quality in tourism training. The project focused, in particular, on a tourism-based job, which the partner institutions train, that is *tourism manager*.

The quality assurance mechanism is expected to increase the efficiency of the tourism-training provided by the partner institutions, the cooperation among some European institutions with a view to facilitating the European recognition of competences, thereby enhancing a greater movement of tourism professionals in Europe.

The partnership kept account of the differences that characterise quality assurance and which result from aspects regarding

the kind of education provided, education and training traditions, the level of education, the peculiarities of the training provider etc. The project tackled the quality of teaching, since the quality of teaching, including content, methods, and teachers are crucial for the achievements of learners. Further aspects that came under scrutiny were how teaching content and methods are designed and the extent to which these are adapted to the *needs of learners*, *the labour markets* as well as to available resources.

Rationale

Tourism education has emerged slowly, but has developed incredibly over the last 50 years in several countries, for which it has become the prime source of income. Tourism education has developed differently in different countries with no over-arching international forum working under the European Commission to control and guide tourism training. In this context, the present initiative sought to bring together a few partner organisations in an attempt to create a more coherent and international synergy in tourism training.

By improving the standards of quality and permanently monitoring them, the project will raise the degree of customer trust in the European tourism training institutions.

The project engaged the partner institutions in an international cooperation which promotes and fosters European collaboration in the area of quality assurance with a view to furthering the development of comparable training criteria and methods.

Given that through its forums and instruments the EC seeks to standardise vocational training throughout Europe,

to improve the quality of vocational training and foster life-long learning, the project contributes to both standardising tourism training and raising the quality of training.

The partners sought to work in the direction of the strategies adopted by the European Council in June 2010 and also in line with Europe's strategy for 2020, which aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, asserting that the route to lasting economic recovery and social cohesion is *knowledge* and *innovation*. The strategy sets up a number of guidelines of importance to education and training such as: promoting lifelong learning, developing a skilled workforce capable to respond to labour market needs, promoting social inclusion, and optimising support to research, development and innovation.

In the conditions of world recession improving the performance of education and training systems at all levels is a priority and it is hoped to offer to individuals access to new work places and job opportunities.

The Aim of the Project

The aim of the partnership was **to establish a quality assurance mechanism aimed at improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism education and training**.

The mechanism involves:
- identifying quality standards for tourism education and training,
- drawing up a framework of standards which relies on VET concepts, paradigms, indicators, benchmarks, methods and good practices.

The partner institutions in the programme are training providers, which sought to adopt and use valid quality assurance norms and standards. Some of the partners have acquired a more thorough quality assurance mechanism, an experience which they imparted with more recently created centres for training, such as the Center for Tourism Training. Thus the project provides the partners with the opportunity to transfer or exchange knowledge and good practices with a view to establishing more reliable and efficient quality standards for tourism training.

The Objectives of the Project

The **objectives** envisaged:
Exchange of expertise and good practices with a view to drawing up and agreeing on a mechanism for quality assurance in tourism training based on the partner institutions' shared approaches, standards, common VET concepts and practices for QA and on their understanding of how the standards function *efficiently*; the mechanism incorporates the institutional traditions of the partner institutions in the area of quality assurance and also takes into account the national requirements.

The adoption of a shared approach to VET in tourism in line with the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), re-enforced by the Bordeaux Communiqué 2008 and by the more recent reports and recommendations issued by the CEDEFOP.

Raising awareness of the training paradigms that the mechanism of quality assurance is based on: adult education, continuing education and learning outcomes-oriented teaching,

second chance training opportunity, all associated with the European VET tools, particularly with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The organisation of a symposium/conference which presents the partners' national and institutional approaches, the partner institutions' experiences and practices and the joint output

The publication of a joint volume which integrates the approaches, mechanism and findings of the partnership.

Forwarding a report to national and EC forums which are concerned with VET in tourism

The dissemination of the project work and output.

The Partners of the Project

The partners involved in the project are:
1. The Centre for Tourism Training, Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania;
2. Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH), Greece;
3. The TARSUS Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI);
4. MuğlaTicaretMeslekLisesi, Muğla, Turkey (MTML);
5. Umbria Training Centre, Scheggino, Italy (UTC).

The partners' main area of concern is tourism training with all its forms: adult education, lifelong learning, outcomes-oriented learning. Since the partners are all training providers, except for the Tarsus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Turkey, a special and permanent area of investigation and improvement is the *quality* of the provided training. The partners have acquired a solid EU project experience, as most of them have

collaborated or coordinated projects and have an impressive list of completed projects. The institutions involved in the project have a good reputation both in their home community and in the EU LLL environment. Indeed, throughout the project lifetime the partners have collaborated efficiently with a view to delivering the project outcomes.

The Flowchart

The flowchart for the activities which conducted to the guidelines for assuring quality to VET in tourism are the following:

1. The partners' contexts, training needs, goals and existing quality assurance systems;
2. Defining the common Quality Glossary;
3. The identification of a common training course, a curri–culum for the agreed on professional profile and its characteristics;
4. Examination and definition of the more appropriate and coherent EQUARF Indicators 2, 6, and 9 and their rele–vance to the project objectives;
5. Questionnaire design;
6. Survey design and survey results. Their consistency with the partner organizations (EDU/VET);
7. Evaluation of the survey results;
8. Reflection on how the implementation of indicators-based questionnaires could improve the overall performance of the training providers;
9. Adoption of the three questionnaires by the partner insti-tutions with a view to improving their quality assurance process.

Some of the Project Results

From the **data gathered trough the questionnaires**, we underline the following aspects:

- The vast majority of the students and alumni (graduated up to three years ago) stated that they were very satisfied with the quality of the training experience;
- The shares of the alumni who obtained a job in tourism is 69.23%;
- 93.3% of the employers believe that, on the one hand *there is a lack of qualified personnel* but, on the other, that there are many cases of *over-qualified persons* on the tourism labour market;
- The most important causes of the encountered difficulties in staff recruitment are *the lack of applicants* and *the lack of competences*;
- Regarding the needed qualities, knowledge, competences and skills that the employers are expecting from their employees when working in tourism, the *specific tourism-field knowledge*, the p*ositive attitude towards team work* and t*he ability to lead a professional conversation in at least two foreign languages* are the most important, but there are specific aspects in each of the four considered countries.

One of the purposes of the project was to identify the common issues of the five VET partners of the project. In this respect, they were asked to expose their strategic goals and objectives and to carry out a SWOT analysis.

The results of the **text analysis of the goals and objectives** show that the partners have many common issues and the most important are:

- The goals and the objectives are defined in terms of the observance of the high quality and/or the excellence of the provided educational services;
- Quality is defined in close relationship with the requirements of the labour market, especially with a successful employment rate of the alumni;
- Mobility opportunities and international initiatives are reflected in the institutional goals and objectives;
- The partners' perception of tourism at present is that it is modern and innovative and thus the professional quality of the students is linked with their *capacity of innovation, change, and creativity.*

The **SWOT analysis** of the activity conducted by each partner institution put forward the following common issues of the tourism training programs (some of them resulted from the applied questionnaires to the students and to alumni).

Strengths:
- existence of adequate material conditions for studies (venues, equipment, supplies, course support);
- the high professional expertise of the trainers;
- a well organised teaching activity;
- the use of appropriate curricula;
- the opportunities to carry out practical/placement activities in tourism agencies and other operators in the field;
- initiation of international collaborations;
- the development of the linguistic competences of trainers and trainees (except for UTC);
- local and national visibility and an efficient marketing strategy (except for MTML).

Weaknesses:
- lack of strategic planning;
- scarce links and relationships with the labour market (especially with the employers) and with other stakeholders;
- lack of financial support;
- staff issues (shortage, age, motivation).

Opportunities:
- the existing tourism potential in each county;
- the development of LLL and EU interest for VET.

Threats:
- shortage of candidates;
- lack of interest of young people;
- competition from other training centres;
- the unbalanced labour market and unfair practices regarding the youth employment;
- influences from national/local institutions (financial, regarding curricula, etc.)

Strategic planning and the relationship with employers and other stakeholders surfaced as common issues that must be improved.

The partners were also asked to evaluate their quality assurance process, especially regarding the teaching-learning aspects and the assessment of the learning outcomes. Thereby a set of indicative descriptors was used to identify their level of application in the training process developed by the four VET provider partners (Table 1). A three-step scale was used for:
– successfully applied;
– improvements are needed;
– not applied.

Table 1. *Quality evaluation criteria*

Quality criteria	Evaluation Criteria
1. Planning an integrated strategic vision.	**Defining the objectives:** • Indicating the type of objectives pursued for medium and long term; • Defining the operational objectives; • Specifying targeted behaviours by objectives related to content and the learners' possibilities (differentiated); • Clarifying learning conditions; • Specifying the success criteria.
2. Designing training activities	**Correlation of the objectives with the other components of teaching (content, strategy, management types, forms of evaluation etc.)** • Defining objectives in relation with the content components; • Correlating objectives with strategies; • Correlating the volume and difficulty degree of requirements with individual characteristics and duration of the settlement; • Identifying and selecting the essentials of the content elements for the achievement of established objectives; **Correlation of objectives with assessment:** • Harmonizing assessment items with the established objectives; • Differentiating requirements; • Correlating the evaluation content with the types of evaluation; • Capitalizing/valorising assessment results for reward or development purposes.
3. The development of training activities	**Enhancing learners' response:** • Catching and maintaining the students' attention, - growing interest in and desire to learn by doing; • Correlating the length assigned to this particular moment with that assigned to teaching, in accordance with the type of lesson, the specific content, the students' psychological and intellectual peculiarities; • Complying with the nature of requirements, the peculiarities of content and students, • Activating the students at the level of proximal development in the spirit of the optimistic learning assumption.

3. The development of training activities	**Content:** • Identifying essentials of content; • Delivering content; • Structuring and organizing content; • Enhancing the formative nature of the content (capacity to generate new ideas, opinions, solutions etc.); • Combining the scientific and practical nature of content; • Making interdisciplinary connections; • Correlating the content with the teaching strategy; • Differentiating types of trainer-trainee interaction; • Correlating the logical approach of the content with the teaching strategy; • Stimulating logical management actions and information processing (analysis, synthesis, correlation, association, definition, explanation, demonstration, generalization, reasoning, interpretation, illustration, synthesis etc.). • Achieving cognitive progress.
3. The development of training activities	**Behaviour:** • Organizing groups of students and training activities; • Creating an appropriate emotional environment; • Motivating activity; • Directing learners' action and thinking; • Stimulating the expression of personal opinion; • Classifying professional issues correctly; • Valorising the students' cognitive experience; • Creating problem-based teaching situations; • Wording directives, orders etc correctly; • Differentiating help and guidance; • Individualising instruction; • Alternating group and individual classroom activities ; • Assessing students' attitude (ironic, accusing, stereotypical, motivating etc.).

3. The development of training activities	**Assessment:** • Carrying out formative assessment; • Connecting assessment content with learning content; • Relating appreciation to objectives • Relating appreciation to the learner's abilities, his previous results and the results of other students; • Encouraging the students' self-assessment and peer assessment; • Relating scoring to the docimological standard; • Motivating grades**.**
4. Psycho-pedagogical behaviour	**Trainer-trainee relationship:** • Creating an atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation; • Stimulating interest in knowledge; • Promoting each student's success; • Encouraging independence, originality, creative thinking; • Valorising the positive features of each student • Having a sense of balance; • Praising, highlighting, recognising talents; • Creating an unfavourable atmosphere: threatens, accuses, criticizes, offends, ignores etc.

Source: Ion Albulescu, MirelaAlbulescu, *Predarea şi învăţarea disciplinelor socio-uman. Elemente de didactică aplicată /Teaching and Learning of the Socio-Human Study Subjects. Elements of Applied Didactics*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2000, pag. 194

The results of the survey carried out as part of the project are provided below.

Some items are **successfully applied** by all the four VET provider partners:
- ✓ Relating appreciation to objectives;
- ✓ Stimulating the expression of personal opinion;
- ✓ Complying with the training requirements, with the content and students peculiarities;
- ✓ Activating the students at the level of proximal development in the spirit of the optimistic learning assumption.

However, some **improvements** are still required and there are situations where the criterion is not used by one of the four VET provider partners (parenthetic):

- ✓ Indicating the type of objectives pursued for medium and long term (CTT);
- ✓ Defining the operational objectives (UTC);
- ✓ Defining objectives in relation with content components (UTC);
- ✓ Clarifying learning conditions (MTML);
- ✓ Identifying and selecting the essentials of the content for the achievement of the established objectives (MTML and UTC);
- ✓ Capitalizing/valorising the assessment results for reward or development purposes (MTML);
- ✓ Combining scientific and practical content of teaching (MTML);
- ✓ Achieving cognitive progress (UTC);
- ✓ Directing learners' action and thinking (MTML);
- ✓ Connecting assessment content with the learning content (UTC);
- ✓ Increasing motivation through grades (MAICh);
- ✓ Creating an atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation (MTML);
- ✓ Stimulating the students' interest in knowledge (MTML);
- ✓ Promoting each student's success (MAICh);
- ✓ Encouraging independence, originality, creative thinking (MAICh).

Other evaluation criteria represent **problematic aspects** for the partners, especially the following:

- ✓ Valorisation of the students' cognitive experience;
- ✓ Creation of problem-based teaching situations;
- ✓ Correct wording of directives, orders, instructions, etc.;

- ✓ Differentiated help and guidance;
- ✓ Individualization of instruction;
- ✓ Assessment of the students' attitude (ironic, accusing, stereotypical, motivating etc.);
- ✓ Monitorization of the relation between scoring and the docimological standard.

These *activities* carried out in order to identify the common and the specific partner institutions' issues permitted a *peer-evaluation (interevaluation)*, which represents a major benefit of this kind of projects. It was very useful for the development of a quality assurance framework proposal for VET providers in tourism, which has been one of the objectives of the LLP Leonardo da Vinci partnership project.

Brief History of Quality Assurance

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Adriana Șerban

T he concerns for quality assurance started in the very old days of antiquity, with the Babylonian Hammurabi's Code and the quality control in the construction process of the Egyptian pyramids, when a set of standards were established. In 1920, Walter Shewhart, physician at the Western Electric of the Bell System Company, designed the initial version of statistical control of quality (SCQ), aiming to achieve the "zero errors" principle (Ilieş, 2003).

The idea of quality has expanded, from an absolute notion regarding the Quality Control according to a set of standards, through the Total Quality Control, to the relative perspectives of Quality Assurance and Quality Management, and to the complex concepts of Total Quality Management, and Quality Culture.

First Theories

The first science-based theories on quality assurance were developed after the Second World War for the field of industry and shortly thereafter for the services sector. In the early '50ies, an American teacher, William Edwards Deming, popularized the concept of quality control in Japan; consequently, in 1951, the *Japanese Union of Researchers and Engineers* established the

Deming Award to reward the companies which have successfully implemented the quality control using statistical methods for this purpose (Ilies, 2003).

Joseph Moses Juran, a Romanian born American engineer and management consultant, launched in 1951 the idea that improving quality is a needed condition for success, and over thirty years later he defined *quality management* through its basic functions – planning, controlling and improving quality – which are the three main issues of the "quality trilogy" as he named it (Juran, 1986).

In 1956, Armand Vallin Feigenbaum defined the concept of *Total Quality Control* – which consists in the integration of all actions and efforts of every company's department - which is the basis of the Total Quality Management (TQM) of today (Ilieş, 2003).

At the beginning of the '60ies, Philip Bayard Crosby stated that quality is free of errors (the "zero errors plan"), highlighting the costs of an unsatisfactory outcome. He also underlined the role of the working people in obtaining good quality products (Crosby, 1979).

Total Quality Management (TQM) concerns all the developed activities of preproduction, production and postproduction which are carried out by every department of a company, including the links between them (Bank, 1992). TQM requires a certain attitude regarding *quality*, a perspective shared at all levels, starting with every working person (Ilieş, 2003) which means a Quality Culture and includes the involvement of the company in both the social-economic and natural environment.

Quality Assurance in Education.
Brief History, Aproaches and Definitions

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Adriana Șerban
Silvia Irimiea

T he quality assurance process has became a very impor-
tant aspect in education, where notions like client,
market, management, strategy, competitiveness gain more and
more momentum.

Quality Assurance in Education. A Brief History

In 1960, Sir Arthur Norrington, former president of Trinity
College, Oxford, has advanced the idea of achieving a univer-
sity ranking system which should classify the institutions into
three classes according to the standard value of the educational
process. This idea was met with a strong opposition from the
universities, so it was not practiced in England at that time
(Nica, 2000).

In the United States, the idea of a hierarchy of higher edu-
cation institutions has been accepted as natural and useful.
In1981, U.S. News and World Report was published, which
represented a ranking system thereafter widely adopted by
other countries (Usher and Savino, 2007). Furthermore, after

The National Quality Award "Malcolm Baldrige", an equivalent of the "Deming" award, was founded in 1980 by the *American Centre for Productivity and Quality*, and in 1999, after almost two decades, for the first time, a specific methodology designed to award this prize in the higher education system was developed (Nica, 2000).

Approaches to quality assurance in education

Starting from industry-bound approaches, quality in education has been defined in various ways, each definition representing a different perspective: Thus quality is seen as:

– exceptional or as excellence (Harvey and Green, 1993; Biggs, 2004);
– perfection to consistency ("zero errors" as Harvey and Green called it);
– fitness to purpose (Harvey and Green, 1993, Doherty, 2008);
– value fo money (Harvey and Green, 1993, Clark, 2000);
– transformation and improvement (Harvey and Green, 1993; Clark, 2004);
– meeting standards (Harvey, 1999; Rocki, 2005);
– organistional culture (Harvey, 1999);
– meeting the students' expectation (Harvey, 1999; Tsinidou, Georgiannis and Fitsilis, 2010);
– meeting the stakeholders' expectations (Harvey 1999, Middlehurst, 1992).

Models of quality assurance in education

Based on these approaches, various models of quality assurance in education institutions have been identified by different authors. They can be summarised in three main categories (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002):

- *Transformative model* – the institution transforms inputs into outputs by integrating all aspects of the educational process;
- *An engagement model of program quality* – similar to industrial management, where all the resources are integrated – human, financial, material - as well as the reports established between them;
- *A model for a responsive university* – the customer-oriented institution, concerned with the quality of services provided and with meeting the market demand.

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) asserts that providing a definition for quality assurance is a cumbersome task, on the one hand, because the term covers a number of complex elements and, on the other hand, because each national education system has adopted its own views and definitions of these elements.

The documents of the European Council and the European Commission define the process of quality assurance as a generic term which refers to a continuous process and comprises: evaluating, monitoring, assuring, maintaining and improving the level of quality of a system, program, or institution.[1]

According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), quality assurance is a part of quality management, providing confidence that quality requirements (need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory) will be fulfilled.

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[1] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, Helsinki, http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050221_ENQA_report.pdf , accessed on 29.07.2013

Definitions

Quality assurance is an organisation's guarantee that the product or service it offers meets the accepted quality standards. It is achieved by identifying what "quality" means in context; specifying methods by which its presence can be ensured; and specifying ways in which it can be measured to ensure conformance.[2]

Quality assurance encompasses any activity that is concerned with assessing and improving the merit or the worth of an intervention in the field of VET or its compliance with given standards.[3]

Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is 'focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled.[4]

Quality assurance consists in processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards.[5]

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[2] ESS Quality Glossary 2010, Developed by Unit B1 "Quality; Classifications", Eurostat, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/documents/ESS%20Quality%20Glossary%202010.pdf, accessed in 02.03.2011

[3] Adapted from Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. OECD, Paris, 2010, http://www.oecd.org/development/peer-reviews/2754804.pdf, accessed in 02.03.2011

[4] AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006: Quality management systems—fundamentals and vocabulary, June 2006, p.9, http://www.defence.gov.au/jlc/Documents/DSCC/Australian%20Standard%20ISO%209000.pdf, accessed in 05.02.2007

[5] An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers. Tuck, R., Skills and Employability Department. International Labour Office (ILO), 2007.eLabour Office (ILO), http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2007/107B09_57_engl.pdf, accessed in 11.03.2008

Quality assurance relates to the achievement of educational program standards established by institutions, professional organizations, government, and/or standard-setting bodies established by government. Quality assurance mechanisms are the processes by which the achievement of these standards is measured.[6]

Quality Assurance in VET

According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), quality in VET has become a key priority at EU level to 'promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, thereby establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning'[7].

The concerns about quality at EU level go back to the year 2001 when the European forum on quality in VET (jointly set up by the Commission and CEDEFOP) was organised and the technical working group on quality in VET (TWG) which functioned until mid-2005 was established.

Subsequent to these achievements, the European cooperation sought to define the common principles, guidelines and tools for quality development.

In 2004, these resulted in 'the establishment of a *common quality assurance framework for VET (CQAF)*'.

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[6] Quality Assurance Practices for Postsecondary Institutions in Canada, Fact sheet no. 5, http://www.cicic.ca/510/fact-sheet-no-5.canada#top, accessed in 20.06. 2014

[7] www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/quality-assurance-in-vet, accessed in 21.04.2014

Following this, 'In October 2005, the TWG was replaced by ENQA VET, the European platform financed through the Leonardo da Vinci programme to ease exchange of experiences, common learning, consensus building and support to further developing the CQAF model in 2008 and 2009'.

In April 2008, the European Commission presented a draft recommendation on the establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for VET (EQARF) adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in June 2009.

The 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 (EQUARF)* proposes a comprehensive set of 10 selected quality indicators which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers. The document also specifies the type of the indicator in terms of context, input, process, output, or outcome indicator and the purpose of the educational policy to which the indicator is responding.

A Guide for Elaborating a Quality Assurance Strategy in Vocational Education and Training

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Adriana Șerban

A proper quality assurance system for vocational education proved to be a challenging task, therefore the European Parliament and The European Council created a number of tools for VET (Irimiea, 2011). The 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* (EQARF) proposes a selection of quality criteria, descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels.

The Steps of the Process

The EQARF is a very useful tool for elaborating a quality assurance strategy for every VET provider. The perspective consists in a four phase improvement cycle - **planning, implementation, evaluation/ assessment and review/revision** – each having an appropriate quality criterion. The criteria are operationalized in two sets of descriptors:
✓ for quality assurance at the VET system level;
✓ for the VET providers' level.

The document includes a comprehensive set of ten selected quality indicators:
– two overarching indicators;
– four supporting quality objectives for VET policies indicators;
– four context indicators.

They can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers. The document also specified the type of indicator (context, input, process, output, or outcome indicator) and the purpose of the educational policy to which the indicator is responding.

Each of the four phases proposed by it presumes two steps:
a. A diagnosis of the actual situation.
b. Planning of the strategy issues.

The diagnosis stage can be elaborated for the entire targeted situation for all the concerned issues.
An adequate way of doing this is to convert the mentioned criteria and descriptors into questions. However, in this paper, we will handle the four EQARF criteria *separately*.

1. Planning

PLANNING your quality assurance strategy is essential for any undertaking (Table I.).
1.a The first step is to carry out an analysis of the real situation, to acquire a truthful picture of the actual position. You should ask questions like:
– Do I have explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators? Are my goals and objectives described for the medium and long terms? Are they linked to the European goals? Are they set and monitored?

– Are the instruments I use for monitoring relevant? Do I have established mechanisms and procedures to identify training needs? Are they efficient enough?
– Have the responsibilities in quality management and development been explicitly allocated?
– Have the standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences been defined at national/regional/organizational level?

Table 1. *The first EQARF criterion*

Criterion 1: Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	
Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	**Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level**
• Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals. • The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels. • Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria). • Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs. • An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/regional data protection requirements. • Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined.	• European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers. • Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored. • On-going consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs. • Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated. • There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development. • Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers. • The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs. • VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place.

Source: *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*

For a deeper and more effective analysis, it is very useful to operate with the EQARF indicators (Table 2) in the same manner. It means that you should convert the indicators in questions.

Examples:

– Which is theshare of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems in my country/region?
– Which is the share of teachers and trainers participating in further training in my country/region/organization? Which is the amount of funds invested?
– How many persons successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes in my country/region/organization?
– Which is the share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the particular criteria in my country/region/organization? Which is the unemployed rate of the VET alumni in my country/region/organization?
– To what extent do the alumni of VET in my country/ region/organization use the acquired knowledge, competences, abilities and skills at the workplace?
– How satisfied are the students, the alumni and the employers with the acquired knowledge, competences, abilities and skills?
– Are there mechanisms used to identify training needs in the labour market in my country/region/organization? How functional and efficient are they?
– Are there some used schemes to promote better access to VET in my country/region/organization? How functional and efficient are they?

Table 2. *Quality assurance indicators in VET*

	Indicator	Purpose of the policy
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance	**1.** Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers (*context/input indicator*): a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative; b) share of accredited VET providers.	• Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level. • Increase the transparency of quality of training Improve mutual trust on training provision.
	2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers *(input/process indicator)*: a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training; b) amount of funds invested.	• Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET. • Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market. • Increase individual learning capacity building. • Improve learners' achievement.
Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies	**3.** Participation rate in VET programmes (*input/process/output indicator*): Number of participants in VET programmes[1], according to the type of programme and the individual criteria[2]	• Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET. • Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups.
	4. Completion rate in VET programmes (*process/output/outcome indicator*): Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	• Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes • Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate. • Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET. • Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.
	5. Placement rate in VET programmes (*outcome indicator*): a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria[3]; b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	• Support employability. • Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market. • Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.

	6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace (*outcome indicator - mix of qualitative and quantitative data*): a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria; b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.	• Increase employability. • Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. • Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.
Context information	**7.** Unemployment rate[4] according to individual criteria (*context indicator*).	• Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level.
	8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups (*context indicator*): a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender; b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender.	• Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level. • Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups. • Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups.
	9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market (*context/input indicator - qualitative information*) a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels; b) evidence of their effectiveness.	• Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. • Support employability.
	10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET (*process indicator - qualitative information*): a) information on existing schemes at different levels; b) evidence of their effectiveness.	• Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision.

Source: *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*

Note: [1] For IVT: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant. For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.

[2] Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrants, persons with disabilities, length of unemployment.

[3] For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.

[4] Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.

1.b. Based on the available data, you should conduct a *qualitative analysis*. In addition, you can compare the performance of your organization with the European, national and/or regional conditions and create your own benchmark. Having the answers to all these questions, you can pass on to the next step: **planning your strategy.**

2. Implementation

THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN is the second phase of your quality assurance process.

2.a The elaboration of an effective *action plan*, should start with the analysis, by using the descriptors of the second criterion provided by EQRAF (Table 3), and converting them into questions.

Examples:
- What VET providers and other relevant stakeholders can involve in the process?
- What available resources do I have?
- Are there guidelines and standards established at the European/national/regional/organizational level?

2.b Based on the answers to the above questions, you will conceive the actions that must be consistent with you stated goals and objectives.

Table 3. *The second EQARF criterion*

Criterion 2. Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	
Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	**Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level**
• Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels. • Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support. • Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels. • Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers. • VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent. • A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation.	• Resources are appropriately internally aligned/ assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans. • Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned. • The strategic plan for staff compe–tence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers. • Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance.

Source: *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*

3. Evaluation

The EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES is regularly carried out and supported by measurement.

3.a The descriptors of the third criterion (Table 4) will help you conduct the analysis of the current situation, asking questions like:

– Is there an evaluation methodology covering internal and external assessment at national/regional/organizational level? Are the stakeholders, especially the employers, involved in the monitoring and evaluation process?

– Are there some national/regional/organizational standards and processes for improving and assuring quality? Are they relevant and clearly described?

– Is there a self-evaluation process and an internal and external assessment system agreed on? Are there some performances indicators established and applied at national/regional/organizational level?

– Is there a relevant, regular and coherent data collection system in place at national/regional/organizational level?

3.b The indicators presented in Table 2 are very helpful for the evaluation of outcomes. In this phase, you should elaborate an appropriate set of tools like *questionnaires* for students, alumni, employers and other stakeholders, a *SOWT analysis*, *data-bases*, *interviews*. These instruments should be properly conceived, having an adequate content, scales and metrics for all the issues you are addressing.

Table 4. *The third EQARF criterion*

Criterion 3. Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	
Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	**Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level**
• A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation. • Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described. • The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector. • Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate. • Early warning systems are implemented. • Performance indicators are applied. • Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. • Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics.	• Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers. • Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education inclu–ding the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfac–tion. • Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders. • Early warning systems are implemented.

Source: *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*

4. Review

The REVIEW is the last phase of your quality assurance strategy and it is a very important stage especially for all improvement actions.

4.a For a *pre-analysis*, you should ask the following questions (Table 5):
–   Are there procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews defined at all levels? Is the review process carried out regularly?

- Is the learners' feedback gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment? Is the learners', teachers' and employers' feedback used to inform further actions?
- Are the results/outcomes of the evaluation process discussed with relevant stakeholders? Are there some improvement actions to be taken?

4.b The second step of the review stage is *to create your own set of instruments for gathering feedback from learners, teachers, employers and stakeholders and other data on the outcomes*, a SWOT analysis, for example. Based on all the collected information you can then design an *improvement action plan*.

Table 5. *The fourth EQARF criterion*

Criterion 4. Review	
Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	**Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level**
• Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels. • Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. • Systems are adjusted accordingly Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available.	• Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. • Together with teachers' feedback this is used to inform further actions Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available. • Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation. • Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place.

Source: *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*

Some Helpful Tips

An improper analysis does not offer the correct picture of the current situation and the adequate information for the action plan or for the follow-up improvements.

It is also important that the institutional strategy, including the used descriptors and indicators, should be conceived according to the EU documents' recommendations and guidelines. Thus, the evaluation results will show the extent to which both institutional goals and objectives have been reached, and the EU recommendations met.

You may add some specific *organizational indicators* and *standards* regarding, for example:

– the professional experience and educational background of the trainers,
– the study conditions (venues, equipment, supplies, and course support),
– the students/trainers share,
– the practical work conditions and results.

The Goals and Objectives

For the goals and objectives to be explicit, they need to be SMART (a mnemonic acronym) (Lawler and Bilson, 2013), which means:
– **S**pecific – Question: *What exactly am I going to do and for whom?* Your goal and objectives should describe specifi–cally the result that is desired.
– **M**easurable – Question: *Can I measure it?* Your goal and objectives should be quantifiable; the indicators must be able illustrate the variations (progressive or regressive).

- **A**chievable – Question: *Can I get it done with the available resources*? **Y**our goals and/or objectives must be expected to be achieved.
- **R**ealistic – Question: *What are the factors that can influence my actions*? When establishing the goal/objective, one must accept that there are factors that are not under his control.
- **T**ime bound – Question: *When will this objective be accomplished*? You have to establish an effective deadline for achieving your goal/objective.

The formulation of a goal/objective should be *simple* and *clear*. For example, it must not contain the words "and" (usually, what follows should be formulated as a second goal/objective) or "through" (what follows this word, usually is an action you must take in order to achieve it).

The Consistency of the Strategy

An efficient method for verifying the consistency of your strategy is the TOP – BOTTOM – TOP path, using the following two questions **How?** And **Why/To what purpose?** Starting from your goal, by asking **How** *can it be done?* you can elaborate your SMART objectives. For each objective the same question must be used and you will conceive the needed actions for it. Taking into consideration every proposed action and asking **Why** *am I doing this*/**To what purpose***?,* the answer must send you back to your objective. Operating in the same manner with the objectives, the answer must meet your goal statement. If the loop is properly closed, your strategic plan is consistent and your action plan will be efficient.

The SWOT Analysis

An effective instrument for planning, analysing and conceiving SMART goals and objectives is a **SWOT** analysis (Ilieş, 2003) (a mnemonic acronym coming from: **S**trengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). Both strengths and weaknesses are concerning your organization and your activities, so these are under your control – you can operate based on your organization strong points, and improve the weak areas of your activities. The opportunities and the threats refer to some aspects of the socio-economic environ–ment and they are not under your supervision but you can use the opportunities and try to avoid the threats. The students', alumni's and employers' feedback (provided especially by questionnaires and interviews) as well as the information from studying data bases and other documents are very important data when elaborating a SWOT analysis.

Data Gathering

A well elaborated *quality assurance strategy* is a needed document in every organization but its efficiency cannot be guaranteed if the instruments used for data gathering are not proper enough for a *right and clear measurement*. A very important aspect for conceiving adequate instruments is to have a clear picture of the competences, knowledge, abilities and skills you want to provide and of their content. You must be aware that together, the knowledge – both theoretical and practical – with the native and the educated abilities and skills are building the needed competences. The European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the National Qualification Framework (NQF), if it is available in your country, are key-documents. Also, practical work in VET is very important, so the related issues and feedback from the students and from employers and/or practical activity instructors is necessary.

The Importance of Practical Activities in Vocational Education and Training

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Adriana Șerban

Livia Bradea

P ractical activities have a great importance in VET for the acquisition of the needed competences and skills. In order to release to the labour market very well trained tourism professionals, you, as a VET institutions must be aware of and to cope with several issues, i.e. both challenges and actions to take.

Challenges

- The tourism and travel sector is very dynamic and the innovative approaches to it today require new and creative work initiatives.

- Employment policies are specific, depending on several aspects of the socio-economic context (for example the youth employment or the period of the touristic season) and might be different as well from a geographic zone of a country to another (due to the touristic potential) (Șerban, 2014).

- The ideal profile of the employee, according to the employers' perspective, presents particular differences.

- The well prepared employee must have multiple competences and skills in different professional areas: management, marketing, finances, customer relations.
- Travel agents and guides are the interface between agencies and tourists (Bradea, 2014).
- Tourists – either as individuals or a group – expect from their guide trustworthiness, kindness, generosity, fairness, accuracy, organizational efficiency, quality and authentic information.

Actions to Take

- ✓ to be very well informed on the socio-economic context and forecast, especially regarding tourism;
- ✓ to keep a permanent and close relationship with the employers and other stakeholders;
- ✓ to investigate the students' periodically, the employers' and the tourists' expectations;
- ✓ to have adequate instruments for conducting the survey on the students', the employers' and the tourists' expectations (i.e. questionnaires, interviews);
- ✓ to develop periodically an enquiry regarding the placement or internship-based learning outcomes;
- ✓ to elaborate a proper set of standards, criteria and indicators for assessing the practice-based outcomes;
- ✓ to have adequate instruments for conducting the survey on the practice-based learning outcomes (i.e. list of the skill requirements, elements of competence, achievement criteria in terms of required knowledge, achievement criteria in terms of required practical skills; achievement criteria in terms of needed attitudes);

✓ to have experts as teachers and trainers, very well prepared in the tourism field, and also in different professional areas: (management, marketing, finances, costumer relations);

✓ to make sure that the training staff uses many and diverse practical methods of teaching (i.e. city tours, study tours in different touristic regions, the production and presentation of tourism projects);

✓ to make sure that the practice-related methods and working techniques are adequate for each stage and/or situation of the tourism activity;

✓ to be able to provide practical placements and/or internships in tourism agencies, and to have a close relationship with these companies;

✓ at the end of the practical placements and/or internships, a proper normative and formative assessment for each student, carried out by the employers, would be very useful.

A Quality Assurance Framework Proposal for the VET Providers in Tourism

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Adriana Șerban

T he quality assurance framework proposed by us is de–signed in compliance with the European Quality Assu–rance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training and also with the requirements of the Romanian National Authority of Qualification. It has been drawn up as part of and a follow up of the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci Lifelong Learning Project PAR/2014/103 project during 2012-2014.

Quality criteria	Indicative descriptors
The effectiveness of the management process	A quality assurance strategic plan was set up, in compliance with the national regulations, the stated mission and the European guidelines.
	A consistent strategic plan is designed based on the relevant analysis of the socio-economic context and the forecast, especially that regarding the travel and tourism industry.
	An annual quality assurance operational plan was set up and is consistent with the strategic plan.
	The strategic and operational objectives are clear and measurable.
	A functional monitoring, reviewing and improvement plan was established.

	A policy and an action plan were set up in order to attract more students, including persons with special needs.
	Adequate instruments for an effective monitoring activity were set up.
	An efficient and coherent system for a periodical data gathering concerning the tourists', employers' of the tourism field and other relevant stakeholders' expectations was set in place.
	An annual internal evaluation is developed.
	A periodically peer-evaluation (interevaluation) with other VET providers in the tourism field is conducted.
	A periodical external evaluation is conducted.
	A benchmark is used in order to develop a set of standards and performances to be achieved.
	A policy and an action plan regarding the collaboration and /or the involvement of the employers, other tourism VET providers and stakeholders is developed.
	A periodical SWOT analysis is conducted.
The professional competence of the human resources	The teachers and trainers are experts/specialists and good practi– tioners in their professional field.
	A proper set of standards regarding the professional competence of the teachers and trainers is set up.
	Activities of training the trainers are conducted periodically.
The effectiveness of the teaching-learning process	The tourism competences-based training programme (curricula and contents) is developed in compliance with the National Qualification Framework and the European Qualification Framework.
	The curricula and the contents are reviewed periodically and adapted to the tourism field requirements.
	A proper set of standards and achievement criteria regarding the needed knowledge, competences and skills in tourism is set up (inclu– ding the management, marketing, finance, costumer relations and project development fields).
	The practice-based activities are appropriate, in terms of weight and content, in order to provide very well prepared tourism staff.
	The teaching methods and techniques (for both theoretical and practical aspects of the training) are adequate for each stage and/or situation of the tourism activity, and also for the learners needs and possibilities (including the persons with special needs).

The effectiveness of the teaching-learning process	The content and the teaching methods and supplies that the trainers are using are permanently reviewed, adapted according to the requirements and the novelties on the tourism field.
	A periodical survey regarding the employers' expectation regarding the ideal employee, in terms of the needed knowledge, competences, skills and attitude in tourism is developed.
	An efficient survey on students' satisfaction regarding both the theoretical and practical activities is conducted at the end of the training.
	A periodical survey on both theoretical and practical learning outcomes is conducted.
	An efficient final assessment of the learning outcomes is conducted against the established standards, and also according to the individual needs and possibilities of the students (differentiated).
	A set of docimological standards is set up.
	Placements and /or internships in tourism companies are provided and an efficient normative and formative evaluation of the students' practical work is developed by the employer.
	A periodical formative peer-evaluation of the teachers' activity of the trainers is conducted.
	A survey regarding the employment of the alumni and the use of the acquired knowledge, competences and skills during the training at their work place is conducted every year.
The adequacy of the material and financial resources	The teaching venues, spaces and supplies are adequate for the number of students and their needs (including the students with special needs) and are offering proper conditions in terms of light, temperature.
	The teaching resources and supplies (computer access, internet access, printed, video and audio resources) are covering the training needs, for both theoretical and practical activities.
	Diverse projects and/or activities are developed in order to ensure the needed material and financial resources.

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