Self-assessment quality assurance tool

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Content

Introduction

The EQAVET framework is structured around a Quality Assurance and Improvement cycle, comprising planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision phases. In the planning phase, clear and measurable goals and objectives are established. The implementation phase involves setting up procedures to achieve these goals, including resource allocation and stakeholder involvement. Assessment and evaluation involve data collection and analysis to assess achievements. The review phase focuses on feedback processing and developing procedures for change.

EQAVET places importance on Quality Assurance in non-formal and informal learning contexts, providing a flexible framework adaptable to different national contexts. This encompasses mechanisms to assess the quality of education and training outside of formal settings, recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals acquire skills and knowledge.

In examining non-formal and informal education across Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Lithuania, several key findings emerge. Quality assurance mechanisms are often limited, relying on feedback surveys and employment tracking. Extra-curricular educational services provided by external organizations are gaining importance, emphasizing the need for quality assurance. Efforts are needed to promote inclusivity and social justice in access to non-formal vocational training. Clarity is required in assessing non-formal and informal training, and a unified framework for VET quality assurance is lacking. Clearer guidelines are necessary for consistent implementation, and municipalities play a vital role in managing non-formal adult education but require more dedicated support. Standardization of coordinator responsibilities is needed, along with a shift towards evaluating content quality and skill development. A comprehensive assessment tool for acquired skills would enhance non-formal education effectiveness. Developing quality assurance tools, improving regulatory frameworks, and providing professional development for providers are crucial steps forward. An information campaign on quality assurance is also recommended to enhance program quality and inclusion in monitoring systems.

Background of the tool for self-assessment

EQAVET stands for the *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training* and has a twofold meaning: it refers to the common European **reference framework** for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, and it also refers to the European **network** of reference points for Quality in VET.

The EQAVET is a **reference model** to which the countries **voluntarily** commit themselves when they develop their national VET Quality Assurance concepts in accordance with the reference model.

The EQAVET emerged from the *2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council*, as a European-wide framework to support Quality Assurance in vocational education and training (VET)

across Europe, and it was revised in the 2020 *Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*.

EQAVET is based on a:

I. Quality Assurance and Improvement **cycle** (planning, implementation, evaluation/ assessment, and review/revision)

- The first phase – **Planning** – includes a set of clear, appropriate, and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources.
- During the **Implementation**, the procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives are established (e.g., development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational or operational procedures).
- **Assessment** and **Evaluation** is in which the mechanisms for the evaluation of achievements are designed by collecting and processing data to make an informed assessment.
- The final phase – **Review** – includes the steps before the cycle starts again: develop procedures to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives: after processing feedback, key stakeholders conduct discussion and analysis to devise procedures for change.

II. A selection of **descriptors** and **indicators** applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels.

EQAVET does not prescribe a particular Quality Assurance system or approach but provides a framework of common principles, indicative descriptors and indicators that may help in assessing and improving the quality of existing VET systems and VET provision. EQAVET can therefore be regarded as a 'toolbox,' from which various users may choose those descriptors and indicators that they consider most relevant to the requirements of their Quality Assurance system.

The EQAVET Framework is prepared to be used at the VET provider and VET system level to support the Quality Assurance of various VET learning environments, including WBL. It applies to both public and private providers.

The **EQAVET Framework** consists of:

-   indicative **descriptors**
-   set of reference **indicators,**

both can be applied on a VET **system**.

*ESS Quality Glossary 2010 defined q*uality indicators as statistical measures that give an indication of output quality. However, some quality indicators can also give an indication of process quality.

Neither the descriptors nor the quality indicators will necessarily apply uniformly to every system or VET provider level. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the different users to determine which procedures and indicators are appropriate in their national or sub-national context.

The EQAVET indicative descriptors help countries / VET providers to analyse their Quality Assurance system(s). The indicative descriptors can be applied to both initial and continuing VET and apply to all learning environments: school-based provision and work-based learning including apprenticeship schemes. There are specific indicative descriptors associated with each of the four phases of the quality cycle: *Planning – Implementation – Evaluation – Review*.

The proposed indicators in the tool for self-assessment follow the quality cycle and take into account proposet set of indicatiors in the EQAVET recommendation. In addition, in preparing the tool, the project team have taken into account some of the main findings from the prepared National Reports (for Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania) that provide valuable insights into the state of non-formal education across the studied regions. Below are listed some of the main highlights from the national reports:

- *Quality Assurance Mechanisms*: Quality assurance mechanisms in non-formal training are often limited, relying on feedback surveys and employment tracking. There is a need for more comprehensive systems to ensure high-quality education.
- *Importance of Additional Educational Services*: Extra-curricular educational services provided by external organizations are gaining importance, especially in short-term courses for employment. Ensuring the quality of these services is crucial.
- *Access to Non-Formal Vocational Training*: Collaboration between formal education institutions, trade unions, and state bodies exists, but these programs tend to benefit individuals with higher formal education levels and social standing. Efforts should be made to promote inclusivity and social justice.
- *Involvement of Civil Society Organizations:* These organisations are increasingly involved in personal development activities and formal education partnerships. However, there's a need for clarity in assessing non-formal and informal training.
- *Unified Conceptual Basis for Quality Assurance*: A unified framework for quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) is lacking. A dedicated document specifically focused on VET quality assurance is needed.
- *Clarity in Regulation*: Regulation of non-formal education for adults lacks clarity and specific guidelines, potentially leading to misinterpretation. Clearer guidelines are required for consistent implementation.
- *Role of Municipalities*: Municipalities play a key role in supervising and managing non-formal adult education. However, coordinators often have other primary duties due to limited funding. A more dedicated approach to this role is necessary.

- *Standardization of Coordinator Responsibilities*: While there is a well-developed network of adult non-formal education coordinators, there is a lack of standardized understanding of their responsibilities. A clear description of the coordinator role should be established.

- *Shift towards Quality Assessment*: Evaluation of non-formal education programs tends to focus on quantitative measures rather than content quality. There's a need to assess learning outcomes and differentiate between skill development and leisure activities.

- *Comprehensive Assessment of Skills*: The assessment of skills acquired through non-formal adult education is limited. A more comprehensive assessment or self-assessment tool could improve the effectiveness of non-formal education.

- *Creation of Quality Assurance Tools*: There is a need to develop and implement quality assurance tools for adult non-formal education. Existing regulations define program requirements, but additional measures are necessary for inclusive and high-quality education.

- *Information Campaign on Quality Assurance*: An information campaign is needed to educate program providers and educators on quality assurance. Implementing a self-assessment process, possibly using digital resources, could enhance program quality.

- *Inclusion in Quality Monitoring*: Non-formal education is not adequately included in quality monitoring systems. Additional information on quality areas and criteria, along with a self-assessment tool, would be beneficial.

- *Regulatory Framework and Functionality*: Improving the regulatory framework and functionality is essential. Establishing a unified register of permits for non-formal education programs and enhancing information systems would enhance data collection and transparency.

- *Professional Development for Providers*: Developing professional development programs for non-formal education providers is crucial. These programs can include workshops and training sessions focusing on instructional design, adult learning principles, assessment methods, and program evaluation.

Overview of the Self-Assessment tool

European education and training policies place a strong emphasis on quality. Based on the EQAVET, in this document we aim to apply a systematic approach to the proposed toolkit. The identified needs are supported by a set of criteria needed to assess quality in non-formal adult learning programmes. Stakeholders may choose and use different criteria, in different combinations and at different times.

Implementation of the toolkit will help every responsible training service provider to realize the importance of quality assurance and chart their path to quality assurance. Each provider can choose a solution that best fits the specific needs and challenges of the target group it works with.

It is important to note that indicators are designed to support the strengthening of a *culture of Quality Assurance within non-formal VET providers*.

No one given set of indicators can be assumed to be a "one-size-fits-all" set of indicators. The task here is, therefore, not to collect data to capture the "total and objective picture" but rather to use collected data to contribute to evidence-based policymaking related to non-formal education programmes for adults, and to assess quality improvement over an agreed period of time.

EQAVET indicators are not discrete categories, i. e. they exist on a continuum and are to be used as part, and in each phase, of the quality assurance cycle. Moreover, the indicators are not static, and the results of measurement are influenced by a variety of factors, e.g., labour market conditions may have an impact on some of the EQAVET indicators.

The use of indicators for setting goals to be reached has many positive aspects since they:

- Help VET providers to establish quality assurance goals and priorities.
- Are precise, specific figures that give impetus to decision-makers to operationalize the objectives, so that they can be measured.
- Allow comparison and benchmarking on the national, regional, and even international levels.
- Support impartial monitoring since the identification of precise reference parameters can reduce the subjectivity of judgment.
- Allow identification of the areas of excellence and the critical areas and support the decision about the most suitable policies and measures to be implemented.
- Provide a solid starting point for the assessment. Without integrating quantitative data with qualitative analysis, any assessment is at risk of subjectivity.

Description

The self-assessment tool aims to provide a structured framework for evaluating the quality of non-formal adult learning programs. It is based on the EQAVET Quality Assurance and Improvement cycle, which includes planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, and review/revision phases.

Aim

The primary objective of the self-assessment tool is to help training service providers recognize the importance of quality assurance and establish a path towards achieving it. By using this tool, providers can identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement in their non-formal adult learning programs.

Principles

The tool is guided by the following principles:
- *Flexibility*: Stakeholders can select and combine criteria based on their specific needs and target audience.
- *Continuous Improvement*: The tool supports an ongoing process of quality enhancement and is not a one-time assessment.
- *Evidence-Based Decision Making*: Data collected using the tool should inform policy and decision-making related to non-formal education programs for adults.

Users

The tool is intended for responsible training service providers involved in non-formal adult education. This may include educational institutions, community organizations, and other entities offering adult learning programs.

Organizational Approaches

Implementing the self-assessment tool requires a strategic approach. Providers may choose to form internal quality assurance teams or seek external expertise for a comprehensive assessment. The tool can be integrated into existing quality management systems or used as a standalone assessment framework.

Challenges

While the self-assessment too offers valuable insights into program quality, there are challenges to consider:

- Data Collection: Gathering accurate and relevant data may be resource-intensive.
- Subjectivity: Interpretation of results may vary, and it is important to ensure a balanced and unbiased assessment.
- Adaptation to Context: The tool may need customization to align with specific national or regional contexts.

Practical Implementation:

The tool utilizes EQAVET indicators, which are not static categories but exist on a continuum. It is recommended to integrate quantitative data with qualitative analysis for a comprehensive assessment. The results can be used to set quality assurance goals, support decision-making, facilitate comparisons, and identify areas for improvement.

Criteria

Quality assurance criteria for non-formal adult education programs are understood as quantitative characteristics of the features of the program(s) intended to assess the quality of the preparation and implementation of non-formal adult education program(s) at the provider and/or national level. Based on the results of the self-assessment, opportunities are created to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the assessed program and to provide specific measures for further improvement of the planning, preparation and implementation processes of the program(s).

The criteria presented are exemplary and can be adapted according to the interests of different target groups (non-formal adult education providers, policy makers and implementers), depending on the other implemented quality assurance measures, applied methodology.

Both quantitative and qualitative indicators can be used for measuring the criteria. Each indicator must include a goal, a monitoring aspect, a specific monitoring period, an assessment method for each criterion must be agreed upon.

It is expedient to prepare a program self-assessment plan, which would include criteria, criteria assessment indicators, assessment methods, information sources, assessment tools, responsible employees, and deadlines. It is recommended to review the plan periodically in order to ensure its relevance and the reliable performance of the self-assessment process as much as possible.

Phase 1 - Planning

Planning is associated with determination of clear and measurable goals, actions to achieve goals and indicators to assess the level of achievement of goals, preparation of relevant documentation to comply with legal acts, analysis of the competitive environment, identification of expectations and needs of potential customers – adults. Accordingly, the planning must be based on the strategic vision of the program provider and the established operational priorities.

Criterion 1: Clarity of Goals and Objectives

Definition: This criterion evaluates the clarity and specificity of the goals and objectives set during the planning phase of non-formal education programmes for adults.

Examples:

- Analysis and forecasting of adult training needs
- Clearly defined objectives, such as specific skills or competencies learners should acquire.
- Measurable goals, with defined indicators for success.

Criterion 2: Stakeholder Involvement

Definition: This criterion assesses the extent to which relevant stakeholders, including educators, learners, employers, and community members, are involved in the planning process.

Examples:

- Involvement of industry representatives in identifying relevant skills and competencies.
- Soliciting input from learners on their educational and career goals.

Criterion 3: Integration of Technology and Innovation

Definition: This criterion evaluates the integration of technology and innovative teaching methods to enhance the learning experience.

Examples:

- Incorporating e-learning platforms, virtual labs, or simulations to supplement traditional instruction.
- Utilizing emerging technologies to stay relevant and competitive in the rapidly evolving job market.

Phase 2 - Implementation

Implementation encompasses a wide range of activities and processes. It is in this phase that the non-formal adult education program is prepared and implemented, the human, financial and material

resources necessary for the high-quality implementation of the program are allocated accordingly, and staff qualification improvement activities are carried out.

Criterion 1: Stakeholder Engagement

Definition: This criterion assesses the extent to which various stakeholders, including learners, educators, employers, and community members, are actively engaged and involved in the implementation process.

Examples:

- Involving employers in designing curriculum and providing work placements for learners.
- Seeking input from learners on their preferences for instructional methods and learning environments.
- Compliance of the program with the learning needs of adults, responding to the principle of innovation and uniqueness from other programs of a similar nature.
- The needs of the learner are clearly defined and understood by all provider staff.
- The programs respond to the principles of digitization and green transformation.
- Publicizing the content of the program, making information available to interested groups.

Criterion 2: Resource Allocation and Utilization

Definition: This criterion focuses on the effective allocation and utilization of human, financial, and material resources to support the implementation of the VET program.

Examples:

- Ensuring that funds are allocated for necessary equipment, technology, and materials.
- Optimizing the scheduling of instructors to meet program demands.
- Effectiveness of staff qualification development.
- Implementation of modern learning technologies in the educational process.

Criterion 3: Learner-Centered Approach

Definition: This criterion assesses whether the implementation process prioritizes the needs, preferences, and learning styles of the learners.

Examples:

- Offering multiple learning pathways or flexible scheduling options to accommodate diverse learner profiles.
- Providing opportunities for self-directed learning and individualized support.
- Use of modern assessment methods to achieve learning progress.
- Application and transparency of micro-credentials.
- Attractiveness of the learning process and ensuring the motivation of learners to achieve excellence.

Phase 3 - Assessment

In the assessment phase, it is determined to what degree the goals of the non-formal adult education program have been achieved and it is found out what the achieved results are at the learner and system levels. In general, the assessment phase consists of two stages: first, data is collected and discussed, and then a decision is made on the basis of that data about the state of quality. In this phase, the strengths and weaknesses of program development and implementation activities are also revealed, as well as the achievements of learning outcomes, which become guidelines for quality improvement.

Criterion 1: Data Collection Methods

Definition: This criterion evaluates the effectiveness and appropriateness of the methods used to collect data during the assessment phase.

Examples:

- Regular and consistent collection of relevant data throughout the program implementation cycle so that they can be used later to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Early warning systems are designed and implemented to help identify and provide early warning of emerging threats to program quality.
- Use of surveys to gather feedback from learners and stakeholders.
- Analysis of performance records and outcomes of participants.

Criterion 2: Inclusivity and Equity in Assessment

Definition: This criterion examines whether the assessment process is inclusive and fair, ensuring that all participants have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

Examples:

- Providing reasonable accommodations for learners with specific needs during assessments.
- Ensuring that assessment methods do not inadvertently disadvantage any particular group.

Criterion 3: Transparency and Communication

Definition: This criterion evaluates how transparent and clear the assessment process is for all stakeholders, including learners, educators, and external partners.

Examples:

- Clearly communicating assessment criteria and expectations to learners in advance.
- Providing regular updates on assessment progress and results to all relevant parties.
- Publicizing learner feedback: testimonials, success stories.

Phase 4 – Follow-up

The review completes the program quality cycle. Its most important purpose is to ensure that the conclusions obtained in the assessment phase are properly reflected in the process of subsequent

activities, that will initiate a new program quality assurance cycle. Also, the results of the self-assessment must be discussed in detail with all interested parties.

Criterion 1: Action Planning and Implementation

Definition: This criterion focuses on the development and execution of action plans to address identified areas for improvement or new objectives.

Examples:

- Creating a detailed action plan with specific tasks, responsible parties, and timelines for implementation.
- Allocating resources to support the execution of identified improvements, such as additional training for instructors or updated equipment.

Criterion 2: Monitoring of Changes

Definition: This criterion assesses the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and tracking the progress of implemented changes.

Examples:

- Conducting regular progress assessments to ensure that planned improvements are on track and yielding desired results.
- Using key performance indicators to measure the impact of implemented changes on learner outcomes.
- Validity and appropriateness of updating the content of the program and/or improving the implementation process.

Criterion 3: Stakeholder Engagement in Follow-up

Definition: This criterion evaluates the level of engagement and involvement of stakeholders in the follow-up process, including their participation in discussions and analyses.

Examples:

- Convening regular meetings or forums with stakeholders to review progress and discuss the effectiveness of implemented changes.
- Organization of peer learning and peer assessment activities.
- Encouraging active participation from industry partners in evaluating the relevance of program updates.