Context research regarding Quality and the use of EQAVET in partner countries

Executive summary report of partner countries interview research on indicators used

Outcome 1

Executive summary report of national research findings, November 2016

Content

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Preface

The Erasmus+ project "EQAVET in Practice" project started in September 2015. EQAVET as an EU toolbox aims to increase the transparency, consistency and transferability of VET providers across Europe. It provides a common reference framework at national level to VET providers to improve, monitor and evaluate their quality assurance policies and practices. What is actually hard to do for many of the providers is the interpretation of EQAVET's criteria and descriptors and to relate it to the policy of their own institute. Therefore, additional support is needed and that is actually the objective area of the EQAVET in Practice project: To develop guidelines for the interpretation of EQAVET criteria to the national framework at provider level,

The be able to develop these guidelines context research is necessary regarding the current use of EQAVET and of the relevant indicators. In addition, the required guidelines will be related to actually three good EU practices, which have already been developed and tested in former EU-projects:

- Peer Review,
- CQAF VET model
- Guidelines for the implementation of EQAVET in national QA policy.

The research task is to report on usage of existing criteria descriptions and indicators in quality assurance at provider level in the participating countries as well as on the key qualities and usability of the selected good practices. Additionally the research needs to address the guidelines that are going to be developed for managers and experts responsible for QA policy of the institutes, as well as teachers who need to be involved in the QA policy.

Research is done in the partner countries Greece (Dimitra ltd), Italy (Effebi Association and Ufficio Scolatico Regionale per il Veneto), Spain (IES Hermanos) and Sweden (Folkuniversitetet Uppsala) in the period of February till June 2016. Directives have been developed to standardize the research procedure as well as data processing. This report is an executive summary of the partner research done. More detailed can be found in the different country reports as well as in the summary report of all country research.

Introduction

Research was done through face-to-face interviews or through group interviews. Thematically the research consisted of an inventory of information on descriptors and indicators used by providers in their own organisation to implement QA. The questionnaire covered to some extent the following issues:

- ➢ Inventory on meaning of "good quality of education" and on its conditions (what does one need to arrange for?)
- ➢ Inventory of current usage of heart of EQAVET (PDCA-cycle) / obstacles
- ➢ Inventory of main indicators used to assure for a good learning outcome (EQAVET and its relation with CQAF VET model themes and indicators)
- ➢ On peer review methodology as means to improve QA (thinking) in a VET organization / obstacles for its usage

Per partner country the research covered between 15 to 30 (A)VET respondents. Average duration of a face-to-face or telephone interview was estimated at 45 minutes. Response was stored in standard report templates, which assured for anonymous data processing.

During the different interviews, two different definitions of good quality of education have been used. The first definition is the one that is provided by the respondent him/herself. This definition was used to stimulate the respondent to talk on behalf of his/her own experiences and conceptions on quality of education.

The second definition is the standard definition which is also used by the European Commission in relation to quality assurance in education: "Quality of any educational institute depends on the capacity to achieve prior set targets". This definition was used to have a focused talk from the same European perspective about the different indicators and criteria of EQAVET.

Results

Results of the research are presented in different content sections. Section 1 is on the outcomes of the general discussion on quality of good education. Section 2 is about EQAVET and the EQAVET cycle for improvement, section 3 is describing the results on the main challenges for improving education, section 4 on the potential use of Peer Review to help improve the quality of education.

Section 1: Good quality of Education

Quality in education is a concept which is rapidly evolving over time, but also has different emphasis according to different institutes, education sectors, and different players in the education system – student, teachers, policymakers, the business community etc.

But all the feedback indicated that apart from differences there is a big area of similarities between the different respondents. The main common elements regarding quality are:

- Employability, or more general deliver your educational objectives. In all countries it is also indicated that stakeholders play an important role in establishing whether this has been achieved;
- A periodically updated curriculum in line with the above requirements;
- Collaboration between education and the world of labour;
- Making students competent in skills and competences required for future demands (of the society as well as world of labour); satisfied students;
- Organising the proper environment to be able to deliver good education meaning not only training materials and class room equipment but more importantly up to date and motivated teachers

Offering good quality of Education

To offer good quality of education the respondents in the different countries agree on the following aspects:

- Arrange for continuous review, evaluation with involvement of all the relevant stakeholders
- Arrange for a continuous process of updating and adaption to meet labour market needs, meaning also arranging for a process through which education can collect this type of information in an easy way
- Create a culture of quality throughout the organisation to involve teachers and teaching staff in the process of reviewing and continuous improvement of materials as well as didactical approaches
- Leadership as a major facilitator for creating a culture of quality
- Develop a learning environment which parallels the actual vocational environment
- Arrange for a focus on learning outcomes with measurable indicators
- Arrange for more personalised pathways of education

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Indicators for measuring good quality

For measuring good quality of education the following indicators have been mentioned (Colom 1)

Indicator most often mentioned by the respondents from Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden	Links to indicator of EQAVET
Student satisfaction	Q5
Student satisfaction of WBL	Q6
Promotion / completion rate	Q4
Competence of teachers	Q2
Employability, interest of employers	Q7
Recognition of qualifications in labour market	Q9
Participation of vulnerable groups	Q8

The table shows the relationship between the indicators mentioned and the EQAVET indicators (Colom 2). It is interesting that most countries do NOT mention the EQAVET indicators, even if many of the used indicators at provider level are similar to the EQAVET quality indicators. This indicates for us, that the knowledge and use of EQAVET-indicators are limited at provider level in many countries.

Section 2: EQAVET criteria / descriptors in use

This section of the report covers the answers on two aspects of EQAVET: the use and the completion of a cycle of continuous improvement when arranging for activities to improve the quality of education, as well as in the use of the EQAVET- quality criteria and descriptors in the different stages of the improvement cycle.

Effective use of the EQAVET cycle

In the partner countries, the attention for the EQAVET continuous improvement cycle is perceived as having great importance, but instead receives a "just sufficient" score for its actual consequent usage. There is much room for improvement in this area. Partners refer to barriers in usage caused by differences in constraint coming from different quality models, the different appeals coming from national boards or authorities, the related bureaucracy as well as the lack of a culture of quality, which is essential for the promotion of continuous improvement of education.

Use of EQAVET quality criteria/descriptors

At the level of descriptors, the results show that EQAVET needs more promotion, explanation as well as support to improve implementation. The descriptor which was considered most appealing by respondents' is the descriptor referring to training of teachers. It was indicated that some EQAVET descriptors are not included in current QA frameworks used by some providers, and vice versa, EQAVET also misses aspects (adequacy of equipment, student feedback, quality of information and guidance f.e.).

Section 3: Main challenges regarding the improvement of quality of education

Main challenges

The following challenges regarding improvement of the quality of education have been mentioned by participants in most of the countries:

- Arranging cooperation with business and practice;
- The realisation of practical training (addressing skills gap)
- Improve of the guidance of students
- Raise perception and awareness of the benefits of working with quality
- Selecting evaluation and assessment methods and quality indicators (simple to muse)
- The formulation of clearly stated goals and the use of a common accepted methodology
- The difficulty to compare and develop shared working methods (between stakeholders, within schools)
- Application of quality criteria to the teachers performance
- Learning from teachers failures and best practice
- Teacher's workload and long life professional learning

In all countries, the professionalism and engagement of the teachers are key factors for designing and implementing Quality management systems in VET and for quality of education in general.

Section 4: Good Education: peer review as a tool to contribute to a sense of quality

Respondents of the different countries differ in their perception on the use of potential contribution in creating a sense of quality.

Respondents indicated that none of the providers in Greece uses peer review despite the fact that they seemed very keen on its usefulness. The majority is considering peer review only as a method of evaluation of teacher/trainers and not for the whole institute. The key benefit of such self-evaluation procedures is to strengthen the professionalism of all trainers involved (contributing to a sense of quality). Some of the Greek providers perceive peer review more threatening than other procedures, as it allows competitors to learn sensitive information about the organisation. They did not see the "peer" into the review, arguing that an official body is more appropriate.

Italian respondents believe that peer review is a perfect tool, as it is "external" but not a "stranger" to school life and tasks, so it is perceived as friendly and proactive; it contributes to spread, gain awareness and share the theme of quality culture creating involvement and participation. The strength of peer review are according to the Italian respondents: reducing the risk of self-referencing; taking advantage of the external contributions which are able to spot the real weaknesses, which often the eyes used to everyday life in the school cannot see.

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One question in Spain has been about ways to make teachers understand the importance of self-assessment. Respondents indicated that it is important the self-assessment is considered and promoted in a positive way: a help to jointly continuously improve education, a benefit to students as well as teachers. This requires a good communication by the management as to engage all staff as well as embedding it in the larger frame of a quality system.

Other respondents from Spain stressed that quality systems should not lead to extra work and such introduction should have impact on the teaching. Still other do not see any benefit in QA.

In all countries, teachers' professionalism and engagement are key factors for designing and implementing Quality management systems in VET.
Respondents perceived that the ability to reflect on their own teaching, critically examine the methods used and looking for alternative ways of teaching is the trainers´ ability to improve the quality of education. To create an increased "quality awareness" may be of crucial importance to improve quality in education. One major way of doing this is to systematically evaluate their own teaching and its results.