



# THE INFLUENCE OF MORE EFFECTIVE TEAM PLANS ON FURTHER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN VET EDUCATION, BASED ON TEAMS' OWN INPUT

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## Abstract

Teams in education are facing the problem of prioritizing how they spend their work day. The teachers/trainers need to teach, coach, visit companies, prepare lessons, but also meet as a team to evaluate student results and other outcomes. As a follow-up teams need to set aims and plan actions for further improvement in their team year plans. It is crucial that the right aims are chosen and the right actions planned. However, teachers state that they still feel they don't have enough knowledge and tools to effectively develop a good, realistic year plan and follow the PDCA-cycle. The QUAL4T2 consortium aims to provide a method and tools that support the educational teams in a qualitative improvement of their team year plans. Next to this toolkit, the project partners provide a Quality Guide for Teams, providing extra information on effective planning for a team in education.

Keywords: Quality, quality culture, quality improvement, innovation, education, teams, PDCA, quality staff, year plan, VET, QUAL4T, QUAL4T2, professional education, secondary education, higher education, adult education

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This QUAL4T2 project is funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ KA2 Grant program. It is a follow up of the QUAL4T project, which focused on quality awareness by individual teachers. The value of the first project but also the needs for the follow-up project were clearly expressed in the final feedback of teachers and trainers from The Netherlands, UK, Spain and Italy, where the pilots took place. Teachers stated that they still feel they don't have enough knowledge and tools to write a good year plan and follow the PDCA-cycle. Teams in VET education are facing the problem of prioritizing how they spend their work day. Teachers need to teach, coach, visit companies, prepare lessons, but also meet as a team to evaluate student results and other outcomes. As a follow up teams need to set aims and plan actions for further improvement in their team plans. It is crucial that the right aims are chosen and the right actions planned!. Therefore, the project objective is to support teacher teams in VET schools in their use of quality assistance mechanisms like the Plan Do Check Act cycle. The consortium aims to use a bottom-up approach and to provide teams with good and easily accessible material to help them in their strategic planning [1].

Three main products will be provided, that will be downloadable for free:

- A quality guide with chapters on how to build up an effective year plan and several tools to help teams get there, including models) for the plan itself
- A book with best practices from the pilots that the partners performed
- A training program that partners will use within their own organisations, and a shorter program that all (VET) organisations can use to train their own teams, or can even be used by teams themselves

This paper aims to give a qualitative insight about the current situation of team work, based on the International Research Report QUAL4T2. It explains how the needs analysis is conducted on the teams and which tools have been developed in connection with this needs analysis. In the last chapter, the structure and content of the tools that will be used in the pilot will be explained.



The coordinator is Landstede Group (NL) and the other partners are Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierra (ES), CIOFS-Formazione Professionale (IT) and IDEC SA (EL) and Koege Handelsskole (DK).

## 2 RESEARCH ON THE TEAMS' NEEDS

The following methodology has been used: First, a short analysis took place of the current situation in the five partner organisations and in each partner country: Denmark, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands and Spain. The partner institutions are three centers for vocational education, one body responsible for systems and policies, and one body providing guidance, counseling and information services relating to lifelong learning. In the second part of the report, suggestions are provided for an effective use of team year plans at European level. Also, brief information about relevant recent or current European projects are mentioned. Finally, the focus is on the partner institutions and the outcomes of the zero measurement questionnaires carried out on current team year plans by pilot teams in education, following the processes of Fig. 1 below. The development of the different pilot tools is based on the outcomes of the partners' chapters in the report and zero measuring; on the recommendations drawn by the national reports and questionnaire outcomes; on the suggestions and recommendations collected at European level; and on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats detected as written in the International Research Report QUAL4T2 [2].

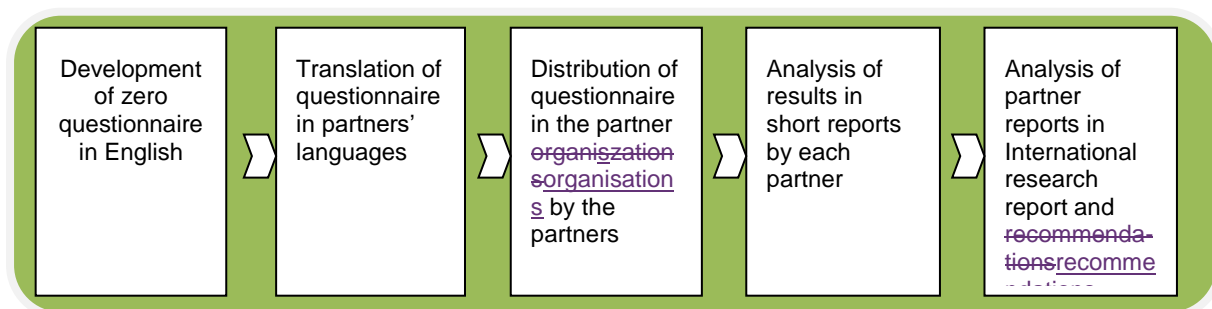


Figure 1. The process of the needs analyses.

### 2.1 The needs analyses of the teams

The analysis of the needs and the situation of teams in the five institutions provided further input for the design of the pilot version of the Quality Guide for teams and the instruments needed. The partners used one translated questionnaire to get input from the teams at an individual level and had short interviews with five targeted persons. The last five participants explained what they feel is necessary for a team plan to be most effective. The zero-questionnaire for the data collection consisted of statements concerning the current year plan of the team itself, and the development of aims and ambitions for the year plan. Respondents were asked to give their opinion.

Table 1. Statements inviting individual respondents to express their opinion.

- The personal involvement in the development of the plan
- The dialogue about the content of the plan
- The knowledge of the final content of the plan
- The specification of the main aims in activities
- The link of activities to specific persons and deadlines
- The feasibility of the team plan
- Their own role in the team plan activities
- The evaluation of the former team plan
- The duration of the team plan



- Their interest for a two-year plan
- The vision or ambition of the organisation
- A commonly shared view about the educational approach as a team
- A mutual decision for the team plan content
- The documents and data that have been analyzed before starting
- A mutual evaluation of the year plan
- Their competencies to analyze data
- Their competencies to formulate aims
- Their competencies to prioritize possible aims
- Their competencies to transfer aims in activities
- Their formulation of SMART aims in a way that they are measurable and feasible
- The team dialogue whether the aims and activities are leading to the desired results
- Faith in the actions they do - being a team member - and that the actions lead to the desired results

The zero questionnaire was originally meant to gather respondent outcomes by four out of five partners. However, the fifth partner also used it to gather feedback, as the questionnaire can give valuable input about teams in any kind of organisation. The number of respondents: 142.

## 2.2 Outcomes

The analysis of the zero questionnaires and the short interviews show interesting differences between the partners across the different countries. Furthermore, they led to the following overall recommendations for the tools to be developed.

### 2.2.1 Overall outcomes

57% of all team members that filled the questionnaire said they had a full knowledge of what was in the plan. Besides, there is still quite a high percentage of respondents who feel the plan is not realistic and haven't got a clear idea about the activities in the plan, the deadlines and the tasks that involve them. Regarding the teams' aims and the ambitions of the organisation, most of the team members are aware of them and feel that they have a saying deciding on the aims and ambitions as a team, but three quarters of the respondents neither feel well equipped with information to make the right analysis for their year plan, nor feel that they have the competencies to make the right analysis for their year plan or to formulate relevant aims after the analysis. Furthermore, 18.3% said they don't feel well equipped to prioritize their aims/ambitions and 14.7% don't feel well equipped to transfer their aims into activities (source Quality guide for teams). Furthermore, 32% of the respondents said that the old team year plan was only partially evaluated or not evaluated at all.

From the report [2]: 66,9% of the respondents feel well equipped with information to make the right analysis for their year plan. 69% feel they have the competencies to make the right analyses for their year plan and to formulate relevant aims after the analyses. 79,5% feel fully or partly equipped to prioritize their aims/ambitions and a slightly higher percentage, 81,7%, feel well equipped to transfer their aims into activities. 88,7% of the respondents feel they are able as a team to formulate SMART aims in a way that they are measurable and can be done. 83,8% say they discuss as a team whether their aims and activities are leading to the desired results. 91,5% of the respondents say that they, as a team member, have faith in the actions they do and that they lead to the desired results.

These results provide the partnership with valuable information to take into consideration in the development of the toolkit products in the Quality Guide for teams.



## 2.2.2 Differences in outcomes between partners and countries

The most specific differences between the outcomes of the partner institutes are about the following questions of the 0-questionnaire:

- *Would you like to work with a two- or three-yearly plan?* The majority of the Danish and Italian respondents answered no; the majority of the Spanish respondents said yes; the Dutch and Greek recipients have equal scores for yes and no.
- *Do you know the vision/ambition of your organisation?* From the Dutch partner, a relevant number of respondents said partly. From the Danish and Italian partners a relevant number of respondents said no.
- *Do you share a common view about the educational approach as a team?* From the Dutch partner, a relevant number of respondents answered yes. From the Danish and Italian partner, a relevant number of respondents said no.
- *Did you decide on aims and ambitions as a team?* In this case most of the Danish respondents said no. A big percentage of Dutch respondents answered partly. At the Italian and Spanish organisations lots of respondents said no.
- *Do you feel well equipped with information to make the right analyses for your year plan?* In both organisations (Dutch and Italian) a great part of respondents answered no.
- *Do you have the competencies to make the right analyses for your year plan?* Among Danish, Dutch and Italian respondents most of them answered no.
- *Do you have the competencies to formulate relevant aims after the analyses?* The only ones who answered yes are the respondents who form the small Greek team of specialists in VET teaching, the rest of the respondents expressed hesitancy answering this question.
- *Do you feel well equipped to transform? Your aims in activities?* In this case almost a third of the Dutch respondents said no. By contrast, among the Spanish and Italian respondents, a big part answered partly. This can be considered interesting, taking into account that, since 2011, it is the Dutch VET organisation who has been investing time for the improvement of this topic. It may be relevant to know that Dutch inspectionate sharpened their audits on quality insurance last years. This may explain the need for even further professionalisation for the Dutch teams in the pilot study?

## 2.3 Recommendations

### 2.3.1 General recommendations based on the research report

Although there is a general feeling among team members that participate in the writing of the team plan and therefore, have knowledge about its content, there is still a quite high percentage of respondents who feel that the plan is not realistic and haven't got a clear idea of the activities in the plan, the deadlines and the tasks that involve them.

Regarding the teams' aims and ambition of the organisation, most of the team members are aware of them and feel they have a saying deciding on the aims and ambitions as a team. On the contrary, three quarters of the respondents neither feel well equipped with information to make the right analysis for their year plan nor feel they have the competences to make the right analysis for their year plan or to formulate relevant aims after the analysis. Furthermore, 18,3% said they don't feel well equipped to prioritise their aims/ambitions and 14,7% don't feel well equipped to transfer their aims into activities.

### 2.3.2 Development of specific tools based on the recommendations

Based on the general recommendations, the QUAL4T2 project partners decided to develop several instruments to help the teacher teams by improving the development of more effective and successful team year plans. The starting point for the development of these tools is the expertise of the quality specialists of the partners involved. In mutual work sessions, several tools have been developed to be piloted in five educational organisations in five different countries: Denmark, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands and Spain. This will take place from June 2017 till May 2018.



### 3 THE PILOT MATERIAL

#### 3.1.1 Quality guide for teams and a toolkit

The final pilot material that has been developed, based on the research and feedback, it consists of a Quality Guide [3] for teams and several tools gathered in three themes. The Quality guide provides teams with further information. The tools of themes B and C are relevant for this topic.

*Table 2. Tools for quality improvement of the year plan.*

Theme B – Team plan tools:

- Road map for a team plan
- Vision/mission development for teams
- Data gathering
- Risk-based thinking
- Setting priorities as a team
- Realistic planning

Theme C - Models for a team plan:

- Team plan model
- Short term improvement plan
- A teaching team year plan
- A year plan model in Excel

#### 3.1.2 Roadmap to a team plan

The 'road map to a team plan' [4] of the theme B causes a special interest. In fact, this tool leads the team along the road, starting from the gathering of data towards the finished team plan. The Theme C provides teams with different models to choose from, depending on the expertise of the team members [5].

The road map to a team plan contains 16 steps, and a team can use it as a guide, it aims to give an overview of the steps that are necessary to develop an effective team year plan. Based on this instrument, teams can use several other tools that are specially focussing on only one step of the road map.

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, we can conclude that the data - gathered on the development of team year plans at organisational and European level - in the Transnational Research Report [2] point out the need to provide teams with tools that help them with:

- Data: gathering, analyses of the data
- Aims: formulating, a reduction of the number of aims, prioritizing



- Activities: the transfer from aims to activities, with detailed and clearly scheduled tasks
- Roles: leadership, administration, clear definition of duties and responsibilities, involvement
- Feedback and evaluation: regularly, updated, peer to peer feedback
- Year plan: open, flexible, user friendly
- Motivation and ambition: ownership, full participation

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