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Quality culture through effective instruments for Teachers and trainers

Research report Italy WP5

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1. Introduction

The aim of the EU project QUAL4T is to enhance quality management, assurance and particularly quality culture. Within VET Institutions quality management is often initiated by the management. Partly teachers, trainers and teams are involved in quality assurance, development and improvement. The quality management system is sometimes not related to the needs of teachers and trainers and leads to the situation that quality management and assurance is seen as a burden or an obstacle to their work and teaching. Therefore, the idea of the project is to develop and test tools that support the development of a culture of quality that reaches and influences the actions of teachers and trainers so that they can improve the quality of learners' experiences in VET.

The aim of the project is to provide a toolkit and a practical guide in partner languages, with ready to use instruments for teachers, trainers, quality staff and mentors, to improve the quality of education. Therefore, we intend to:

- develop a quality improvement culture in line with the recommendations of teachers and trainers in VET
- learn from partners' proven quality culture instruments and adapt them for other consortium organisations
- connect management and teachers through a management brochure
- provide an approach with supporting products that can be used by VET providers across the EU to improve outcomes of learners.

The aim of the report is to get an insight into the different quality approaches of the partner countries and institutions. The report provides basic information on the development of the toolkit products. These products will be based on the needs and best practices that the teachers describe in the case studies.

In the first part of this report the general situation of quality assurance in VET education in the partner country will be described. Different quality approaches used in the VET organisations in the partner country, the initiatives to use EU quality tools and the best practices within the country will be described. In addition to the general description of the situation in the country, the results of the case studies conducted in the partner institutions will be described. These partner institutions are four centres for vocational education, one body responsible for systems and policies, one university and one body providing guidance, counselling and information services relating to lifelong learning. This chapter will contain their perspective on quality assurance in their organisation, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of institution's quality assurance/culture by teachers' perspectives, best practices used by teachers and recommendations from teachers' perspective for development of quality. As a conclusion the report will give recommendations on the development of the toolkit products following the results of the report.

This national report describes the situation of VET in Italy and the different quality management systems that are used in VET. The Case study was conducted within an initial VET provider: Associazione CIOFS-FP. In January 2014 the questionnaires were distributed to CIOFS-FP Regional Boards whose managers selected the trainers to whom allocate the tools according to their own teaching experience and quality engagement. 25 questionnaires returned: 20 of them were completed by trainers whereas the other 5 by Quality responsible and/or internal auditor; 4 questionnaires were supplemented by interviews.

The questionnaire and interview guide for the data collection consisted of questions concerning quality culture of the respective institutions, the quality management and assurance within each institution, the trainers' or teachers' individual methods to assure and develop quality and their recommendations for quality management. Additionally, sociodemographic data like gender, age and taught subjects were collected. The findings of case studies conducted between December 2013 and January 2014 will be provided in this report.

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in Germany, CIOFS-Formazione Professionale in Italy and IDEC SA – Consultants – high technology applications – Training in Greece.

This national report describes the situation of Quality Management System used by CIOFS-FP Association in Italy, placing it within Italian VET scene (brief picture of VET quality assurance scenario).

2. General situation of quality assurance and quality culture in vocational education and training in Italy

The education system in Italy is organized according to the principles of subsidiarity and of autonomy of schools. The State¹ has exclusive legislative competence on general issues on education, on minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country and on the fundamental principles that Regions should comply with within their competences. Regions share their legislative competences with the State on all education issues except for vocational education and training on which they have exclusive legislative competence. Schools are autonomous as for didactic, organization and research and development activities. Compulsory education lasts for 10 years (from 6 to 16 years of age). It covers 5 years of primary school, 3 years of lower secondary school and the first two years of upper secondary school. Compulsory education can be accomplished also by attending three and four-year courses offered within the regional vocational education and training system. The upper secondary level of education has a duration of 5 years and it is offered in both general and vocational pathways. Students can go from the general education system to that of vocational training, and vice versa. Higher education is offered by both universities and the High level arts and music education system. This level of education is organized, according to the Bologna Process, in a three-year first cycle followed by a two-year second cycle.

QA in VET regional system – accreditation

Training activities granted by the ESF requires compliance with certain ex-ante conditions of the systems that lead to the full implementation of European strategies on transparency of qualifications (Europass, EQF, ECVET, Validation of prior learning) and quality assurance (EQAVET).

Initial Vocational Training (IVT) and Continual Vocational training (CVT) activities, aimed at achieving a professional qualification, are subject to regional planning. Such planning is based on the analysis of professional and training needs made by:

- the Ministry of Labor - the project Excelsior "*Information System on Employment and training*", annually provides a forecast framework of labor demand and professional and training needs expressed by businesses. Each enterprise records any recruitment employee programs for the next twelve months and the corresponding outputs.
- on 2012, Isfol² created a survey "*Audit of professional needs*", which investigated the needs of skills and knowledge of workforce out of 35,000 enterprises of all economic sectors (excluding PA)

The majority of training bodies obtained certification under ISO-9000 standards. Moreover the regional planning of VET activities also refers to minimum training standards related to the technical and professional skills of 21 professional qualifications (three-year pathways) and 21 diploma degrees, whose description is structured in skills, abilities and knowledge according to EQF scheme. The principal system action, linked to the evaluation of the quality of regional VET system, is **accreditation**, approved on 2001 with a decree by the Italian Ministry of Labor. With such, compulsory minimum requirements were defined at national level with the cooperation of all parties concerned and regional governments have put this system in place over recent years.

The aim was to ensure that all training providers, applying for funding from regional governments, were able to perform vocational training activities according to those quality standards.

¹ Article V of the Italian Constitution

² Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of workers - is a national research institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

Those minimum requirements relate to the following aspects: infrastructures and logistics resources, economic and financial reliability, management capacity and professional resources, effectiveness and efficiency of training activities and relations/network at local level. For each of these five criteria the national decree sets down quantitative and qualitative indicators that have to be measured and assessed, parameters stating the level of the quantitative data and the characteristics of the qualitative information, and indices setting the thresholds of the quantitative parameters or fixing requirements and conditions for the qualitative parameters. It is up to the regional governments to assess whether these requirements are fulfilled. Only the VET providers that can successfully demonstrate that they achieve the minimum level required are allowed to take part in regional tenders. They enter a regional register of accredited institutions that is updated each year and vocational training activities will only be assigned to providers appearing in that register.

Number of accredited VET providers year 2011

Table 1: Number of accredited VET providers

Geographical position	
North	1907
Center	1506
South and Islands	3311
ITALY	6724

Source: ISFOL

Over the years, the mechanism of accreditation evolved from a perspective attentive to the management aspects of organizational and logistical support towards an approach designed to focus on the quality of achieved performance, with emphasis on the factors related to the educational product and its effects, rather than those related to the process.

Despite the fact that accreditation uses various indicators required by EQAVET Recommendation, it seems necessary to coordinate the nomenclature, the objectives and the ways to achieve them so as to tighten the 'relationship' between the two models, with a view of improving and boosting the quality of VET services.

The final launch of 2009 Recommendation on Quality Assurance in vocational education & training from the European Parliament and Council³ engendered the need to think over the situation of VET system, over the QA initiatives already existing and over those to be introduced.

On April 2012 the National Plan for Quality Assurance in vocational education & training, developed out of the EQAVET Recommendation, was jointly adopted by the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) and the Coordination of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

The methodological structure of that National Plan and the improvement actions there-in identified reflect the Italian context, which is characterized, as already mentioned, by the presence of multiple institutional actors at national and regional level, by the significant role of the social partners, which help to define and implement all active labor market policies in the field of vocational training, and by the extreme heterogeneity of the educational offer. Actually the NP has been implementing.

QA in general education system – National Evaluation System

The strategic priorities of general education system, even those related to quality assurance, are defined by the Ministry of Education by means of guidelines adopted with the agreement of the Joint Conference of the Regions.

A Regulations establishing the new National Evaluation System⁴ (SNV) was recently approved and is actually being started within school system; it aims at assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the national education system of education and training, framing such assessment in an

³ 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

⁴ The Regulations of Presidential Decree of March 8, 2013 n. 80, establishes, defines and regulates the National Evaluation System of public schools and educational institutions accredited by the Regions under the Law of 28 March 2003, n. 53.

international context and enshrining the importance of the relationship between external evaluation and self-evaluation.

The SNV is coordinated by INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training), assisted in his task by INDIRE (National Institute of documentation, innovation and educational research) and a contingent of inspector.

The evaluation process unfolds through four phases:

1. self-evaluation of educational institutions - using "Scuola in chiaro", a public database created by the Ministry of Education, and filling out an electronic format created by INVALSI, schools write a self-evaluation report and prepare an improvement plan;
2. external evaluation by team of experts, coordinated by a technical manager, which redefine the improvement plans of schools;
3. improvement actions, with the eventual support of INDIRE, or universities, institutions, associations chosen by the schools themselves;
4. public reporting of the results of the process, according to a logic of transparency, sharing and service improvement with the school community.

3. Quality assurance and quality culture in your own organisation

3.1. General information on quality systems and quality approaches in CIOFS-FP

CIOFS-FP was established in 1986 as a non-profit association and, at present, it operates in 13 regions in Italy through 61 local vocational training centres. It provides vocational training in partnership with other non-profit and vocational training organisations, as well as social partners, public bodies, enterprises and their relevant organisations. Its main focus is to support young people, trainers and local networks, which sum up services and support granted by public and private bodies involved at a local level. Since the year 2000, to ensure the quality of its services, the Association has obtained ISO 9001 Certification applicable to *“Research, design, trainers’ training and consultancy for planning and managing vocational training and guidance services. Organization and management of communications activities and partnership networks for such services. Design and provision of vocational training services with particular reference to initial training and lifelong learning (including work-based training and personal development)”*.

At beginning only the core business processes, linked to the design and delivery of VET and guidance services, were certified and annually reviewed. Later, as the system developed, other “soft” processes were - such as student selection, reporting arrangements, accounting systems, learning outcomes. When necessary each process, and the associated procedures, has been revised on the basis of national and regional regulatory requirements. This process-led quality management system has allowed the Association’s to identify the needs of each VET centre and implement appropriate strategies which meet the local circumstances.

Each Regional Board of the Association CIOFS-FP sets annual targets in key areas identified by senior management. These targets are regularly monitored and, annually, the senior management team analyzed the performance. The results are presented to the Board of Directors in order for a system-wide change to be identified and implemented.

Data and feedback on performance is collected from:

- VET students who systematically complete satisfaction questionnaires, internship diaries, self-assessment, lesson observations, and final reports on their own performance. Students also participate in discussions on their courses by appointing their own representatives;
- companies where students complete work placements and training. Their views are collected on internship evaluation sheets and during meetings between the VET center and enterprise-based tutors;
- partners in the Association’s transnational projects using evaluation tools developed for these projects. In addition specific indicators are used to assess the strength of the partnership such as the quality of cooperation, each partners’ reliability and continued willingness to exchange information or collaborate;

- the VET trainers provide data on their team work, on how well training is coordinated and on the logistical arrangements for each project.

At least once a year, QMS responsables and internal auditors from all CIOFS-FP centers meet together for a “Quality Day”: each year the topic of such day changes according to priorities but, of course, it is always related to QA so that participants can discuss, study and cooperate (following PDCA cycle) to improve our QMSs.

Quality day 2013 topic – analyses, led by LRQA, of all improvements in our QMSs (Changes of systems, best practices to be shared amongst the RBs/CIOFS-FP system)

Quality day 2014 topic – new ISO standard for non-formal and informal training possible certification – first overview on draft new ISO 9001:2015.

Since the adoption of a QM approach, a strong collaboration with the National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Italy has been tightened and this has led to different activities realized together such as, for instance:

- the experimentation, in some of CIOFS-FP VET centers, of the tool “*Guida all’autovalutazione per le strutture scolastiche e formative*”, edited by ISFOL;
- the involvement in many researches and surveys on Italian VET system held by ISFOL;
- the introduction of Peer Review Methodologies on the basis of the documents edited by ISFOL “*Manuale di Peer Review per l’Istruzione e la Formazione Professionale iniziale*”.
- the provision of all technical supports (delivering of Peer training sections and arrangement and monitoring of Peer review visits amongst schools and VET centers) to National Reference Point for the experimentation and diffusion of the Peer Review Methodology in Italy

These identified the ever-increasing need of benchmarking performance against other VET providers and the importance of listening to the view of a wide range of stakeholders.

3.2. Quality in teams

Quality Assurance activities have been improving the flow of information and data between the National Headquarters, the Regional Boards and the VET centers. The use of consistent and reliable data has also provided the senior management team of the Association with the evidence they need to analyse and improve the organisation.

The strong collaboration between internal stakeholders (trainers, tutors, coordinators, central support teams) and external ones (for instance the companies for whom training courses are designed and implemented), who are both involved in the design of training phase and in delivering guidance and training, proved to be strongly effective and efficient to the final goal of achieving a good qualification for the students to spent on the market labour.

During a training year, each Regional Association develops and implements specific trainers’ training programs. In addition, the National Association develops a cross-sectional training plan for all the operators of the whole association – administrative/secretarial staff, project designers, tutors, trainers and so on. After analyzing the training needs of each regional association/training center, the outcomes of the previous year cross-sectional training plan and once defined priorities and found resources, the board of directors approves the new trainers’/operators’ training plan which is managed by the National Headquarter in Rome.

Both training programs proved important to overcome some challenges the association has to cope with, such as

- the achievements of Association goals, by means of a fully involvement of all human resources;
- a qualified answer to beneficiaries needs, by a deeper analysis of the impact and consequent improvement of the organisation of training programs/pathways
- the comparisons across Local boards and VET centers by means of collaborative learning;
- the improvement of internal communications, by implementing new communications tools and media.

- And the association itself learnt good lessons: the ever-increasing involvement of the human resources at all level can ensure continuous improvement of the Quality Management System (QMS). Moreover the use of the Peer Review methodology highlighted our strengths and weak points and introduced some European indicators that had not yet been considered by Association.

3.3. Inventory of initiatives to use EU quality tools such as Quality cycle, EQAVET, ECVET, EQARF?

All CIOFS-FP VET training pathways have been designed according to EQAVET Quality cycle: the indicative descriptors and indicators EQAVET set for each of 4 criteria were compared to check their matching with those required by accreditation system.

Evidence of such can be found in http://www.eqavet.eu/gc/gns/case-studies/all-case-studies/italy/12-01-31/Italy_%e2%80%93_Standardising_internal_processes.aspx

Recently CIOFS-FP association supported Italian Ministry of Education in arranging the activities of EQAVET Working group 1 on facilitating the development of a QA approach: we presented the national scheme for work-based learning we manage as a case study to be discussed on within the WG. Soon the case study will be published in EQAVET website.

During the years experimentation and research pathways were undertaken to qualify learning processes by means of innovative tools and methodologies aimed at ensuring the training success of all those who address themselves to CIOFS-FP. With such aim in mind we implemented the project *Label Enterprise* - Creation of a quality label for European companies who employ trainees coming from EU countries (EACEA - 2010-1-FR-LEO04-14413-6) and *Italian Peer Review network 2010 and 2012* - National-level experimentations of European quality assurance methodology and tools and reference to the main themes in the Copenhagen process, applied to initial training (ISFOL, 77PR – CIG0342316817).

Italy has recently published the First National Report referencing Italian qualifications to the EQF: it places the qualifications awarded within the education system the regional ones (IeFP and ITS) within the eight levels in the Common European Framework. As a second step it is foreseen to put into the the framework all the qualifications awarded by vocational training and all regulated professions.

3.4. Best practices and instruments that work for quality improvement in teams

During last three years the National Headquarter managed some training pathways for CIOFS-FP trainers tackling with “challenging classes” characterized by the presence of pupils with learning difficulties, behavior disorders, language-related difficulties or different cultures.

These are classes that require the intervention of experts, but our operators require a training support too so as to learn and recognize the various difficulties and/or disabilities and to avoid or reduce their negative effects within the classroom. Thus they were trained on relational dynamics with particular reference to the activities for youth-groups, on intercultural training methods and techniques, on how to inter-act and collaborate with local actors and institutions operating in the same area of intervention such as social and health services, NGO associations and professionals. This training project proved efficient as the trainers were able to directly apply the outcomes of training in their own classes: as an evidence the application of the technique of circle time within compulsory VET paths, as a guidance group space and time through which everyone in class-group could express themselves and be heard. This approach affected positively the young people as they could express themselves freely within their peers and respectful from each other, with the trainers serving as facilitators of communication.

Soon after the training above described, the National Headquarter arranged a trainers’ training aiming at developing an integrated approach against the burn-out of trainers. It was successful as indicated by 95% of the participants who acknowledged the raising of self-awareness, self-esteem and assertiveness at the benefit of teaching in the classroom. Through the creation of a community

of experiential learning, able to self-sustain and increase their skills in the recognition of situations with a strong emotional impact, and through the discussion of the proposed cases, the sharing of experiences and reflections solicited and encouraged by the experts, they acquired strategies for prevention and management of stress which activated a positive influence on their presence in the classroom. Some team building and teamwork activities were realized, such as the creation of a choir or the weaving of a network. The outdoor training was used within the initial training pathway for young people as Sales Operators held in VET center CIOFS-FP in Tuscany.

4. Case Studies at CIOFS-FP

In January 2014 the questionnaires were delivered to our RBS and 25 trainers filled them. Out of those 25, 4 were also interviewed. The majority of respondents were trainers and 5 were all engaged in quality activities as responsible of QMS and/or as internal auditors. Below the outcomes of gathered data.

4.1. Teachers perspective on quality assurance and quality culture of own organisation

According to CIOFS-FP trainers, the Quality assurance/culture is firmly rooted in the policy and in the mission itself of the association that puts young people and their needs at the center of all educational provision just like ISO standards' client oriented approach (IT2 – IT5 – IT7 – IT8 – IT10 – IT12 - IT13 - IT14 - IT16 – IT19 – IT20 – IT25).

Over the years, QMS processes/procedures proved to be effective instruments to improve teaching and learning methods, the core business of our institution, as they help the staff/operators think about continuous improvements, those necessary to meet foreseen teaching goals, and think about team working (all stakeholders perspectives are checked to find out educational gaps) (IT4 – IT5 – IT6 – IT8 – IT9 – IT10 - IT11 - IT13 - IT14 – IT16 – IT17 – IT18 - IT23 – IT24).

Quality Assurance helps the trainers to better organize both their daily work and long term ones, regularly check them and eventually review them to meets educational goals (IT3 – IT9 – IT10 – IT11 – IT12 - IT13 – IT14 – IT16 – IT18 – IT19 - IT23 – IT25).

Newly recruited trainers are supported on how better “exploit” QMS to provide effective educational activities (IT3).

Benchmarking within Local boards and VET centres is another good quality tool towards the spreading of best/effective practices within the organization and, above all, it is useful to share the feeling of belonging to a structure which really works for young people (IT4 - IT5 – IT7 – IT9 - IT15 – IT16).

By following QMS approach it is easier to master and to design educational interventions according to the target learning ability, motivation and needs, even differentiating interventions according to the needs of each student (IT8 – IT10 – IT11 – IT14- IT17 – IT22 – IT24).

4.2. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of institutions quality assurance/culture by teachers perspectives

Strengths

A youth-oriented approach to the development of "life skills" necessary to promote the personal growth and job insertion of young people within a competitive rapidly evolving world;

To rely on a cohesive team that commits itself and invest its skills in favor of a common goal;

A constant checking of teaching effectiveness through monitoring tools from students, families and enterprises allows trainers to highlight any issues or critical areas where changes should be made;

Handle problems by analyzing their causes and identifying rooms for improvement;

Never leave trainers lay on achievements

Weaknesses

QC could not support empathic skills, because they cannot be standardized, whereas, those years, they proved to be the “drivers” to manage ever-increasing difficult classes.

Lack/shortage of time compared to the workload to realize: everybody has little time to process a lot of data and/or do very much, and thus affected the Quality of teaching

Opportunities

Increasing diffusion of the mission and of good practices and, during training delivery, dissemination of new/more effective training methodologies even coming from external organizations and associations VET providers.

Foster internal communication flows and interaction amongst professionals

Benchmarking with professionals with other VET providers and more

Threads

Stressing deadlines leave insufficient time to prepare quality lessons, above all for users coming from socially disadvantaged background.

4.3. Best practices used by teachers

Integration among workshop - learning unit (UdA) - knowledge area module

This integration allows students to acquire a skill, by realizing a task/ product that can be “evaluated” as the result of the work of each student or of the group and in terms of its quality. The UdA is jointly constructed by the trainers (teamworking), through the identification of a point of interest for the students, and a concrete product around which the various disciplines organize content. Specifically, the students are illustrated in a clear manner what the expected results are, the activities to be conducted, the skills to be acquired, the human resources involved, the tools to be used and the assessment rubrics. The formulation of the rubrics strengthens and completes the pedagogic value of the UdA, and the understanding of the skills and training goals related to the UdA. In fact, right from the moment the UdA is presented to the student, assessment criteria and the related rubrics are provided.

Business simulation – (ITa- ITb) – Many courses are designed pretending to be a real firm (for instance a travel agency or a graphic design studio) within which each learner is asked to play a specific job and is given tasks and responsibilities to accomplish.

For trainers’ training – **cooperative learning and teaching with case studies.**

4.4. Recommendation from teachers’ perspective for development of quality

All respondents wrote down that trainers must attend a constant and targeted upgrading/training, specifically on:

- pedagogy and management of problematic groups and the identification of new teaching methodologies and practices which facilitate teaching and “capture pupils’ attention (IT2 – IT3 - IT4 - IT5 – IT8 – IT23);
- updating on any changes in the legislation and innovations on school/VET system and the national education (IT7 – IT14 - IT24);
- further improvement in soft skills such as communication strategies and/or time managing (IT1 – IT9 – IT11 – IT12 – IT13 – IT16 – IT17 – IT19 – IT20)
- the knowledge and the comparison with other successful experiences in terms of the teaching / learning (IT15 – IT20 – IT22)
- Cooperation/team working (IT10)

5. Recommendations for designing the toolkit products following the research outcomes in country report.

A European toolkit should include: easy-to-use tools including examples of simulations, role playing, workshop activities, and resolution of cases useful to weave/reinforce teambuilding towards teamwork.

Those tools should be flexible and adaptable to the different context, different “beneficiaries/target group” but within a framework where to compare their use and effectiveness amongst users.

The toolkit should cover all the steps of the Quality cycle and introduce tools for:

1. Planning
 - Examples of Educational Programming Sheet
2. Implementation
 - Examples UdA/ Business simulation
3. Assessment & Evaluation
 - Examples Learners'/ Families'/ Enterprises' questionnaires
4. Review
 - Examples Teachers'/trainers' training

References

Based on:

- a. Desk research
- b. Results of 25 questionnaires and 4 interviews

Research:

- The optional interviews: ITa, ITb, ITc
- Questionnaires: IT1, IT2, IT3,...

Examples for further literature:

- **Monographs:** AA.VV “Linee guida per i percorsi di istruzione e formazione professionale” (2003-2008) Roma: Istituto Salesiano Pio
- **Articles:** all materials/documents in RPN - URL: <http://www.isfol.it/eqavet/menu-rpn/il-reference-point-nazionale>