

# **“Expanding the Spirit of Quality Assurance”**

**Short report on the outcomes of the discussion from the seminars with teachers and managers regarding the improvement of the impact of quality initiatives in the different partner countries**

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## 1. Introduction

This report is part of the European project "Expanding the Quality Spirit of VET (Q&VET)" aiming at investigating ways to cross the gap between management policy actions regarding Quality Assurance of education and the actual effect of these policies in the classroom and on the outcome of teaching. The project is coordinated by Folkuniversitetet Uppsala in Sweden. The project consists of the following partners: Quality Austria (Austria), Republican Institute for Vocational Education (RIPO) of Belarus, Beypazari District Directorate for National Education (Turkey), General Directorate for Friuli Venezia Giulia School Inspection Service (Italy), Institute of Economics, Management and Law of Kazan (Russia), N.P. Pastuhov's State Academy of Industrial Management (Russia), Revalento (Netherlands) and Tomsk State University (Russia).

The research part of the project consists of two phases. In the first phase an online questionnaire is offered to teachers and managers regarding quality initiatives taken and on their outcome. The second phase consists of group interviews with managers and teachers. These interviews will focus on describing best practices and the way they are prepared and introduced in the organization to assure good impact on the outcome of teaching. Both types of research will be used to develop practical guidelines, the final product of the project.

In this report the findings of the second part of the research will be presented: the outcomes of the group discussions and interviews with teachers and managers in the different partner countries. The report describes the different steps taken, the findings of discussion and ends with summarizing how quality initiatives could be improved according to their opinion. For each suggestion it is indicated how it can contribute to a better implementation of a PDCA cycle in the organization. In this way the findings can easily be linked to EU policy regarding the implementation of the EQARF framework. This report needs to be read in combination with the report on the outcomes of the questionnaire in the different partner countries and both form the basis for the development of guidelines.

In this report the words "respondent" and "he, him" are used to refer to male as well as female respondents.

## 2. Procedure

In the Project Expanding the Spirit of Quality Assurance Quality Austria and Revalento have both been responsible for the research and workshops procedures as basis for the development of guidelines. An online questionnaire was developed to cover the first part of the research. The first transnational meeting has been used to discuss relevant themes for this questionnaire. Elaboration of these themes has been done through CEDEFOP study of other research initiatives on quality and some of their main findings.

All translated versions have been uploaded in February 2013 at Folkuniversitetet Uppsala and made available through the Swedish program called Netigate. The online questionnaire was made available up to April 2013 offering all partners the opportunity to send out an optional second invitation for participation. In general this has led to the number of respondents as was indicated in the original proposal (an average of 50 or more teachers and managers). Results of the findings have been presented in the September 2013 report "Short report on the outcomes re the online questionnaire on quality initiatives in the partner countries".

Based on the outcomes of the first research a set of 6 thesis have been developed for discussing the research findings and collect input for the development of guidelines. The discussion was planned to take place in work group sessions, seminars or other discussion forms which are suited best for the proposed target groups (teachers and managers) in the different countries. Purpose of these meetings was to validate the first research findings and collect input for guidelines. To assure for common procedures in all partner countries on information exchange, discussion and data collection a template has been developed. This template was send to partners in September 2013 (see "General plan for discussion with peer groups and teachers"). Furthermore a template for

a flyer for this event was developed by the Italian partner. Workshops, focus groups, seminars, interviews and the like have been organized in the period from end of September till end of November 2013. Based on the template and an example report each partner has produced a standard report on own findings and has sent this to Quality Austria and Revalento. First general findings of this stage of the project have been presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> transnational meeting of the project in December 2013 in Istanbul. Outcomes of this discussion as well as outcomes of each partner report have been used to prepare this current general report.

### **3. Impact of general procedure**

This section summarizes the partner results regarding the procedures followed in the different countries and on the number of participants. Most participants in the partner countries have received the first research findings as well as the different thesis in advance.

#### **3.1 Procedure:**

Austria: Invitations were sent out through email, phone-calls and personal invitations resulting in workshop run in November, with participants from Higher Vocational education and from secondary education. Discussion concentrated on thesis 4 and 5 (see below).

Belarus: As a national governmental institute RIPO has invited VET institutes from all over the country. The group discussions have been part of a more general programme of RIPO on quality of education in Belarus. For this reason it was quite easy to attract large numbers of participants from technical vocational education, higher professional education and secondary education. A total of 4 peer group meetings were held during the period of September and October 2013.

Italy: A mixture of approaches was used combining focus group work (10 sessions), face to face dialogue as well as a large conference. Thus USR Friulli

Venezia Giulia involved participants from secondary education, (initial) VET, higher professional education as well as adult education in the period from late June till end of November 2013.

Netherlands: A mixture of approaches was used to attract participants from primary, secondary and initial vocational education as well as from higher professional education. Workshops were offered at a large international conference in September 2013. Three focus group sessions have been organised in three different VET institutes, each time with manager as well as teachers. Additional information was collected through personal contacts, interviews and online reactions on the thesis in the period from September till end of November 2013 covering all 6 thesis. Also sector experts were involved.

Sweden: Results are based on telephonic interviews with teachers and managers from Swedish VET institutes throughout the country in the period of September till November 2013. The telephonic interviews covered all 6 thesis. Part of the findings are also collected during the international conference in Vasteras on 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2013. Russia: Discussion and workshops have been organized by the three partners participating from Russia (Kazan, Tomsk and Yaroslavl). Focus group was used as a general means for discussion although discussion was also organised through Skype due to distances. A total of five focus groups have been organized: 2 covered all thesis, the others a selection. The focus groups covered participants from Higher Education, Vet organisations, training centres as well as representatives from 20 different cities. It is important to understand that the dynamics regarding quality initiatives are totally different for education which addresses the real economy compared to the rest of the educational institutes. The first are more quality aware and quality driven while the latter are more frustrated.

Turkey: Through the regional network of Beypazari District Directorate a workshop has been offered to regional education for discussing main findings and quality in education. Three follow up sessions have been organised to discuss a selection of 3 out of 6 thesis. Promotion of the workshop and seminar through

direct contact and mail succeeded in attracting participants from mainly VET institutes.

### 3.2 Participants

In the table below an overview is presented of all participants in the different partner countries.

Education / staff	AU	BE	IT	NI	SE	RU	TU	Tot:
Primary, total:				2				2
- managers								
- teachers				2				
Secondary, total	3		122	3		18		146
- managers			8	1				
- teachers			114	2		18		
(initial) VET, total		112	9	21		19	28	189
- managers		33	1	6		12	5	
- teachers		79	8	15		7	23	
Higher Prof, total	3		19	9		38		69
- managers			1	5		10		
- teachers			18	4		28		
AVET, total			7		12			19
- managers								
- teachers			7					
Sector experts				11				11

The different strategies which partners have used to attract participants from different educational segments have been successful since the research covers all educational sectors. Gravity point of participation however is on VET and on secondary education. VET sector results show the highest representation of managers participating (30%) compared to % of participating teachers (69%) in almost all partner countries.

Achieved participation rates are in general higher then indicated in the original project proposal.

## **4. Outcome of discussion on results of online Questionnaire**

At the start of each session, workshop, focus group and or interviews the participants have been asked to discuss some of the findings of the online questionnaire (national report send to all participants prior to session, or short summary of findings was presented first). In general all respondents confirmed that there seems to exist different types of realities within educational institutes. The reality of managers and school boards and the reality of teachers involved on day to day basis with student / learners. Since these realities do not have a good overlap or connection the perception of managers and teachers differ. This gap was confirmed in all countries although the extent of the perceived gap differs from country to country as well as from organisation to organisation. QA measures are thus evaluated and perceived in a different way. As was indicated by Italian representatives one can at least discern institutes with a clear top down vision and approach, being less concerned on teacher involvement. Another vision is of a more open and holistic kind in which common goals and ambitions are recognised. A third one is the vision and reality of organisations which have become rather passive, demonstrating a negative attitude and critical acceptance of modernisation.

In Russia these differences are more sharp in institutes which focus on the traditional education. In institutes which are more market oriented this is different. They understand the benefits and needs of QA to achieve a better market position.

## **5. Outcome Discussion Thesis 1**



Conference, workshops focus group as well as interviews offered the opportunity to discuss all six hypothesis and generate answers for solving the problem underlying each of the hypothesis. Comments on each will be presented separately. When applicable, special remarks from different countries will be reported. Please note that thesis have relationships with each other. Therefore not all thesis needed to be discussed in the discussion groups or interviews, all depending on the choices the participants have made.

*"An open and safe culture<sup>1</sup> of our organization is a requisite for an effective quality management and for learning and development of all staff"*

Not discussed in Austria due to choices of the participants. The hypothesis is agreed upon by almost all. By the participants this is considered to be essential / ideal in our western culture as a kind of basic requirements for managers and teachers to work together constructively and jointly contribute to the continuous improvement of education. Important is also to tolerate mistakes. Keywords mentioned by the participants are: creation of openness by being transparent, create common goals and objectives, treat each other (as well as students) with respect, and communicate with respect (NL, Sweden, Italy, Turkey, Belarus). Share responsibilities and give responsibilities, create co-determination, invite teachers to talk and participate, since teachers feel this is often lacking (Russia, Belarus, Italy, NL, Sweden). Now people in schools feel that there is a lack of shared responsibility, too much top down, and teachers take responsibility for only their little part.

Many state, that the thesis is theory but unfortunately not reality, and also the sharing is sometimes in contradiction with the paradigm of teacher as being a king in his own classroom (Italy, NL). Participants also mention that this attitude is also related to disappointment (no gains perceived, too much extra work and bureaucracy) thus leading to a kind of "withdrawal" (Italy, SE, NL).

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<sup>1</sup> note: open and safe culture needs to be understood in relationship to the culture and context of partner countries, therefore its notion can differ: for example designing processes to structure what needs to be "open"

## 6. Outcome discussion Thesis 2

*"Managers have become disconnected from the educational process. For that reason their quality initiatives have a risk of losing impact or even frustrating learning outcomes of participants."*

Not discussed in Austria due to the choice of the participants. The hypothesis is agreed upon by almost all teachers and managers in the different countries (slightly different in NL for primary education). Participants indicate that there is no ownership, or at least not a common understanding of the work of teachers. Managers indicate that there is often also no understanding of their role and responsibilities as well as their constraints (Sweden, Italy, NL). One often responds to Government, Inspection, stakeholders or other external input or requirements without having an understanding of how the institute, the learning outcomes of the students will gain from it (Sweden, Italy, NL, Belarus). Participants indicate that to their opinion money and rules are the major concern for taking actions. The situation is a little bit different for school leaders in (small schools for) primary education (NL). But for their boards (covering several schools) the hypothesis is correct also. Participants of some countries indicate that changing this situation requires also a different attitude of managers<sup>2</sup> (Sweden, NL, Belarus). Managers are not approachable enough (Sweden, NL, Italy, Turkey). Key words mentioned are: communication, share responsibilities, co-determination, forming teams / arrange for team work, facilitate initiatives in a realistic way, involve in a visible way stakeholders (businesses), create realistic expectations, share benefits, outcomes and improvements (Belarus, Italy, NL, Russia, Sweden, Turkey).

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<sup>2</sup> In Belarus, NL, Italy, Austria and Sweden relatively more comment of participants on a required attitude change of managers

## 7. Outcome discussion Thesis 3

"Teachers have become skeptical on quality initiatives since these initiatives in general do not have clear goals and are not facilitated well enough."

Not discussed in Austria due to the choice of the participants. This hypothesis is agreed upon by all participants, managers as well as teachers, in all countries. This kind of skepticism has occurred gradually participants say, and was considered being started due to: overflow of rules and regulations, the creation of big school organizations, Also participants indicate that initiatives are not well presented by managers and therefore not well understood. This easily leads to disappointment of people, to paper exercises, wasting energy without clear result /effect / reward (Belarus, Italy, NL, Russia, Sweden, Turkey). Also if initiatives are frustrated by lack of means and/or time teachers are losing their interest in them. Also initiatives are perceived as a way of appraisal (Russia, Sweden and NL): If you do not meet the level you get fired (thus perceived as negative).

Due to this skepticism teachers tend to forget that renewal or innovation can also create new opportunities for better education (Italy, NL, Russia, Sweden) but teachers do not see / take the chances offered (anymore). Key words mentioned to solve this skepticism are: Create ownership, formulate realistic targets, offer professional space (for development, responsibility and involvement), arrange for good facilities and support, arrange for common goals and vision, explain and involve people, motivate and honor staff, show benefits, open culture (Belarus, Russia, Sweden, NL, Italy, Turkey).

## 8. Outcome discussion Thesis 4

*"Teachers do not like to reflect on their own quality of work or are not willing to accept feedback genuinely. "*

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The majority of participants in the partner countries (managers as well as teachers) agree with the content of this thesis, but with some mixed attitudes toward themselves. One recognizes the hypothesis but not always in one's own behavior (NL, Sweden), one is convinced of own freedom of teaching and therefore do not accept checks or external feedback (Belarus, Italy, Russia in the traditional educational institutes, Turkey). There is too little feeling of team, too little collaboration, feeling of openness and respect (towards students) is often lacking. "We all can improve on giving and receiving feedback". Educational institutes need to develop toward professional learning communities (Belarus, NL, Sweden, Russia for true economy oriented education) with more institutionalized methods on quality at all levels (Austria, Russia, Turkey).

Some key words mentioned by the participants to improve on this: work on culture (students pupils are clients), managers should be an inspiring example, teachers need to tread students with respect. Improve communication: positive feedback on results and achievements, reduce administration for teachers, be aware that quality happens in the classroom, create development opportunities (Austria, Belarus, Italy, NL, Russia, Sweden, Turkey).

## 9. Outcome discussion Thesis 5

*"Quality initiatives tend to get followed immediately by new ones, creating lots of restlessness within the organization as well as lack of time for good implementation."*

This thesis meets substantial agreement by the participants in all partner countries. Participants indicate that many teachers complain about the excess of initiatives and the limited time they have to attend to them, as well as the lack of finances to support the properly (Belarus, NL, Italy, Austria, Russia). Measures taken also do not have time to be implemented in the whole organization, or they lack time to get discussed and evaluated properly (NL, Italy, Sweden,

Turkey). Teachers are quite often not involved (Austria, Belarus, NL, Sweden, Italy), so when it does not work new measures are taken again (NL, Italy). "Demands take all attention and energy and the rest is not taken care of, drops out of our hands". Participants indicated that big organizations at concern level have different demands compared to the lower levels. Initiatives taken at that level are seldom translated to level of teaching programs or explained to the level of the teacher. Participants indicate that initiatives are not linked to real and recognizable needs at lower levels. Creating ownership is often forgotten (Austria, Belarus, NL, Russia, Sweden, Italy, Turkey). Initiatives are not well thought through from the beginning: what does it mean for an organization at different levels? (Austria, NL, Sweden, Turkey).

To improve this keyword mentioned by the participants are: creating joint clear vision and objectives, prioritize QA initiatives and concentrate on only a few issues and keep these on the agenda all the time, plan available resources, show teachers effect and benefits, create win – win situations, arrange for timely communication for different groups in the organization, create joint determination processes, enhance affiliation of teachers and formation of teams with own responsibilities (create learning culture), tolerate errors! (Austria, Belarus, Italy, NL, Sweden, Turkey).

## 10. Outcome discussion Thesis 6

*"Teachers do not have a clear and similar understanding re reasons and results of quality initiatives"*

Not discussed in Austria. The thesis is recognised in general by most participants although national contexts differ and generate some different reasons for this as well as approaches to solve this. Participants have indicated that teachers often do not clearly understand the motives and benefits (of some) QA initiatives (Italy, Belarus, NL, Russian traditional education, Turkey). In some countries participants suggested this asks for a more stepwise process of change (Italy,

Russia traditional education). Participants have indicated that the core elements required to improve in this aspect relate very much to the key words mentioned in the other 5 thesis. "Communicate, communicate, communicate" is what many participants have suggested to managers and boards. "Create links between different levels and parts of the institute". Define win-win at all levels. Take the time to do things properly. Plan for a proper and complete PDCA-cycle. Participants suggested to managers / boards to think ahead re how to implement the institute's policy at team level (Belarus, Italy, NI, Sweden, Turkey) as well as how to engage relevant stakeholders.

## 11. Overview of the main General recommendations made

All workshops, focus groups, seminars and interviews were concluded by asking the participants to reflect on the how: how can we work toward a situation in which these two sometimes separate realities gain much more overlap. Recommendations are a kind of summary of the main ideas coming from the discussion on Thesis. In the tables below the general overview of these ideas are presented. The format follows the European EQARF structure (European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009): Planning, Implementation, Assessment and Review. Partner findings are as much as possible summarized in short, more general statements. The below findings will be used for the development of the intended guidelines, the aim of this project.

<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be transparent when taking decisions</li> <li>• Communicate with more respect, and in time</li> <li>• Involve staff and make staff more responsible, stimulate an entrepreneurship kind of attitude in schools; convince of usefulness, co-determination</li> <li>• Create a professional learning community within schools</li> <li>• Create common vision and objectives</li> <li>• Develop team directives (jointly) / a professional code</li> <li>• Define win – win jointly</li> <li>• Define critical points</li> <li>• Allocate realistic resources in transparent way</li> <li>• Management realize that development takes time, make clear choices, limit yourself to one or two main initiatives per year (prioritize)</li> <li>• Look at the world behind the figures: the reality is different; Before taking an initiative make a good analysis of the problem at hand</li> <li>• Work SMART, plan for the whole PDCA cycle in time</li> <li>• Formulate achievable and shared goals</li> <li>• New initiatives need to have clear relationships with older ones</li> <li>• Inspection re assess your own parameters for good education and your own involvement</li> <li>• Disseminate the planned activity to all relevant stakeholders and engage the relevant ones too</li> <li>• Develop apt evaluation and communication strategy and plan</li> <li>• Institutionalise QA (personal level as well as at school level)</li> <li>• Plan resources, especially time-resources</li> </ul>
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<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make staff more responsible, stimulate a entrepreneurship kind of attitude in schools</li> <li>• Facilitate the participation of motivated teachers</li> <li>• Involve external experts to start an objective process of intervention</li> <li>• Additional training of managers</li> <li>• Donate means at staff level for achievement of specific developments</li> <li>• Managers should also participate in the primary process to know what is going on</li> <li>• Managers need to be involved personally, inspiring examples</li> <li>• Take small steps which generate a good outcome and use them as a motivator</li> <li>• Chose appropriate communication strategies during process</li> <li>• Teachers grab your opportunities</li> <li>• Work SMART</li> <li>• Better balance work load of teachers</li> <li>• Keep initiatives on the agenda of your team</li> <li>• Make use of external expertise from those (teachers) which have experience in the area</li> <li>• Arrange for students feedback</li> <li>• Promote LLL for managers and teachers</li> <li>• Reduce administrative work for teachers</li> <li>• Enhance the affiliation of teachers by giving them the feeling of common responsibility for Quality -&gt; contributes to the development of quality culture</li> </ul>
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<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with more respect</li> <li>• Take feed-back from students seriously (students / pupils are customers)</li> <li>• Positive effect of feed-back for teachers should be pointed out to teachers</li> <li>• Create a professional learning community within schools</li> <li>• Involve external experts to start an objective process of intervention</li> <li>• Take small steps which generate a good outcome and use them as a motivator</li> <li>• Work SMART</li> <li>• Keep initiatives on the agenda of your team</li> <li>• Organize peer review but introduce through an external</li> <li>• Monitor most urgent needs that occur during the process and</li> </ul>
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	<p>addressing them without delay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture of error tolerance is essential; install framework for improvement and see errors as chance to improve.</li> </ul>
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<b>Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be transparent when taking decisions</li> <li>• Communicate with more respect</li> <li>• Create a professional learning community within schools</li> <li>• Look at the world behind the figures: the reality is different</li> <li>• Work SMART</li> <li>• Keep initiatives on the agenda of your team</li> <li>• New initiatives need to have clear relationships with older ones</li> <li>• Inspection re assess your own parameters for good education and your own involvement</li> <li>• Properly close the initiative, evaluate all your original goals and objectives</li> <li>• Properly communicate on process</li> <li>• Listen and accept criticism</li> <li>• Explain the positive effects of review</li> <li>• Accept errors</li> </ul>
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### ***Additional general remarks:***

Below is a summary presented of remarks and recommendations which do not fit in the above framework. Either because they are addressing national policy issues or the context of education and teaching in general. Also some remarks are contradictory due to the specific national context and history.

- Respect for the profession of teachers has declined, give the profession a new boost (attractive profession, improve image)
- Reduce administrative burdens, create some own policy space at school level
- Evaluate the current way of measuring quality (criteria, indicators), its (bureaucratic) impact as well as its impact on education: can we improve on this?
- "Do not make QA like a sports competition" (SE, NL) versus "Make QA like a sports competition (with additional symbols and rewards)" (Belarus, Russia)

- Need for a certain amount of self-regulation versus the need to structure
- Introduce the EU dimension in Education

## Closing remarks

The above findings are collected in different countries with different traditions in education and in quality assurance. Also the material is collected from a vast range of different kinds of education. Therefore not all remarks made by the participants will be applicable to the same level and in the same meaning in the different partner countries.

The material presented will be used to develop guidelines for QA initiatives, the end product of this project. To ensure that the guidelines are of transnational relevance they will be presented to managers and teachers in each partner country before finalisation.