

Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning

Final Report

24th October 2013

This report has been prepared, as a contribution to the debate on policy development in adult learning, by the Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning, established in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination under the work programme of ET2020.

It is presented to the European Commission for further dissemination among policy makers at national and European level as well as social partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

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POLICY SUMMARY

KEY MESSAGES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION TOWARDS QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

In 2011 two Thematic Working Groups were set up, within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (*ET2020*), to address, respectively, the issues of quality in adult learning and financing adult learning.

The Thematic Working Group (TWG) on quality in adult learning interpreted quality as defined by the four key dimensions of equity, efficiency, effectiveness and relevance¹.

The TWG worked on both policy suggestions and the development of a toolbox of draft instruments to support them.

The draft **instruments** focus on three priority areas: the accreditation of providers of adult learning, staff quality and indicators. They are presented in the full report and detailed in the annexes.

The TWG identified the three **key messages** presented below to inform and focus the policy debate on how best to improve the quality of adult learning provision. The TWG considers that quality in adult learning can only be addressed through an approach covering all sectors of education and training and, while there is the need for a stronger evidence base, three strands of action can be envisaged towards a lifelong learning approach to quality assurance.

Drawing on the body of the report, the rationale for each message is set out. Messages are complemented with **suggestions for action** addressed to national policy-makers and to the European Commission.

¹ This definition of quality is proposed in UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. 2009. Global Report on Adult Learning. Hamburg: UIL. Cf. section 2.1 in the report.

Key Messages

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➔ Assuring the quality of adult learning provision requires a comprehensive approach that crosses all education and training sectors. ➔



Good quality adult learning meets the expectations of adult learners, helping them develop the desired skills and knowledge at the desired level. Such expectations can be very diverse, as adults undertake learning for many different purposes (from social and occupational inclusion to career progression, from job change to widening personal interests) with a view to developing skills and knowledge from basic to high level.

The diversity of adult learners' needs and objectives requires an equally diverse provision of formal and non-formal learning opportunities, from second-chance education to higher education to vocational training and beyond.

The provision of adult learning opportunities, therefore, cuts across all sub-systems of education and training, takes many forms and has a strong non-formal dimension. Policies to assure quality in adult learning cannot adopt a sector-based approach to address what can be termed the cross-sectoral nature of adult learning. (Cf. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report below.)

The case for a comprehensive approach is not made solely by adult learning stakeholders. Tools developed for each sector of education and training are proving inadequate to support the increasing demand for flexible learning opportunities, which cannot easily be assigned to pre-defined boxes. The Communication on Rethinking Education has highlighted the need for the co-ordinated development of instruments for transparency, recognition and quality to pursue a European area of skills and qualifications².

² Communication on Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes, COM(2012)669 final, p. 8.

 **More systematic evidence-based evaluation of quality approaches and tools in adult learning is needed to inform / enable further development.** 

Although there is some evidence that quality assurance is paying off, the underlying empirical evidence needs further exploration, especially in the context of adult learning with its mix of public and private provision. To date, however, most systems and tools expressly developed to assure the quality of adult learning opportunities have been subject to little or no evaluation. Many are indeed quite recent, but a good number of measures are approaching a stage where a first reflection on their effectiveness and efficiency becomes possible.

Besides assisting learning providers to explicitly address quality assurance, a stronger knowledge-base on the strengths and weaknesses of quality approaches and tools will contribute to and support, action within all three strands presented below.

A comprehensive approach to quality assurance in lifelong learning can be best achieved by pursuing three strands of action:

- ➔

- **complementing existing resources;**
 - **developing and extending existing resources; and**
 - **integrating resources into a consistent framework of principles, criteria and guidelines.**

➔
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If a comprehensive approach that crosses education and training sectors is the only way to address quality in adult learning, as argued above, achieving a European set of principles and arrangements for quality assurance – still catering for the specific needs of education and training sectors – is an ambitious objective. However, it does not need to be built from scratch: existing instruments provide not only inspiration and expertise, but also a tangible basis.

Many resources are available. There are European instruments for quality assurance that do not expressly address quality in adult learning as such, but have an impact on adults in vocational training (EQAVET³), in higher education (ESG⁴), in basic education⁵ or otherwise seeking a qualification⁶. There is no shortage of models, approaches and tools to assure quality in education and training at national level, and transnational projects have developed a multitude of quality systems and tools⁷.

Even by building on these instruments, achieving a quality assurance approach that can be applied throughout the whole provision of education and training demands resources and time. In the meantime, quality in adult learning can be pursued by action that can produce results in the shorter-term, by adjusting and complementing the existing tools and by developing the current EQAVET instrument.

³ Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for vocational Education and Training, OJ 2009/C 155/1. cf. <http://www.eqavet.eu>

⁴ The European standard and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education - cf. http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso

⁵ Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 12 February 2001 on European cooperation for quality evaluation in school education, OJ L60/51 of 1.3.2001.

⁶ The principles for quality assurance for the implementation of the European Qualification Framework as set out in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 23 April 2008, OJ 2008/C 111/1, and http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm.

⁷ As gathered in particular in the QALLL (Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning with a focus on VET and AE) network, cf. <http://www.qalll.eu>; QALLL was a thematic network (2010-2012) of 15 National Agencies (NAs) for the Lifelong Learning, Programme, coordinated by the NA Austria.

Action to achieve a comprehensive quality assurance approach across education and training sectors can then be organised in three strands of action:

- (1) Bring together, complement and adjust quality models, instruments and experiences to better address issues relevant to adult learning.

Action within this strand can deliver useful results in the short-term, as improving and testing existing instruments may be done within one or two years.

To provide guidance on how such action could be taken, the TWG, drawing on existing resources, produced the toolbox presented in the report.

- (2) Develop, as appropriate, the available European quality framework, EQAVET, in such a way that it can support the quality of outcomes of both vocational and non-vocational adult learning, in closer co-ordination with the provision of lifelong guidance and opportunities for validation of prior learning.

Action in this strand includes both technical and policy, so implementation is unlikely to be any earlier than three years hence, probably in 2016 or 2017.

- (3) In the long-term, pursuing quality in adult learning should be part of an integrated approach to ensuring the quality of outcomes of all learners across all sectors of education and training and in line with the need to recognise all learning.

While working to improve and further develop existing tools – which can deliver useful results in the shorter term (by 2015) – debate and expert work can start to identify quality principles, criteria and guidelines common throughout lifelong learning provision. The advantage of this approach is increasingly apparent in other policy areas. In particular, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes have made it clear that qualifications need to be quality assured on the basis of commonly recognised principles. They have also provided evidence that a cross-sectoral approach can be effective while safeguarding the characteristics of each sector of education and training.

This is a demanding development that requires sustained policy exchange as well as technical work, so 2020 is the most likely target date.

These three strands of action are defined from the point of view of the adult learning policy area. Developments in other areas of education and training may be relevant to the first strand and, even in the area of adult learning, countries may present different situations and starting points.

Suggestions for action

- The European Commission and national authorities disseminate this report and the report on the TWG on financing adult learning to all stakeholders, including policy-makers, the social partners, providers, practitioners and experts, to promote a systematic and evidence-based dialogue about quality and efficiency in adult learning.
- The European Commission, together with national authorities and involving all stakeholders, establishes a set of European indicators, which can draw on the experience of EQAVET as well as on national experiences and a number of projects, and reflect the available data.
The quality criteria and indicators proposed by the TWG are intended to provide a stimulus in this regard.
National authorities take steps to improve the knowledge-base on adult learning, to ensure the availability of data on provision and effects to serve for the European set of quality indicators.
- National authorities, involving all stakeholders, take steps to evaluate quality assurance resources and approaches to identify which of them produce the best returns on investment in assuring the quality of adult learning.
- National authorities, involving all stakeholders, review and further develop instruments and practices for the accreditation of adult learning providers, taking advantage, as appropriate, of the draft framework produced by the TWG.
- National authorities, involving all stakeholders, work towards establishing staff requirements and developing opportunities for initial and further training of teachers in adult learning, taking advantage, as appropriate, of the draft quality policy checklist and the profiling grid produced by the TWG.
- The European Commission and national authorities, involving stakeholders, bring together the debates on staff quality in adult learning, VET and higher education. This should build on the European-level work already carried out in relation to developing and managing the competences of staff involved in adult learning and the recent report on the professionalisation of higher education staff.
- The European Commission considers developing a European tool to support cross-country transparency of the accreditation of providers of adult learning opportunities, building on existing national practices and the draft accreditation framework produced by the TWG.
- The European Commission and national authorities – with specific reference to the National Co-ordinators for the renewed agenda for adult learning and the EQAVET National Reference Points – promote the debate on how to develop EQAVET, in order to address the quality of continuing VET as well as non-vocational adult learning.
- The European Commission and national authorities launch a debate at European level supported by expert work to develop principles, guidelines and arrangements for quality assurance across education and training sectors in a comprehensive lifelong learning perspective, in such a way that the specific features / requirements of education and training sectors are also appropriately addressed.

THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

FINAL REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

This report is the final product of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) established in 2011 in the framework of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) to address quality in adult learning, an issue that has been explicitly on the European agenda since the publication of the Commission's Communication on adult learning in 2006 and has been reinforced in the intervening period by a series of European policy developments, including the Conclusions on the renewed European agenda for adult learning in 2011.

The report is one of a pair of TWG reports on adult learning in 2013, the other being the final report of the TWG on financing adult learning. Both quality and financing are key themes within the renewed agenda on adult learning and are closely linked to one another across a number of key dimensions. The TWG on financing provided insight and support for the work of the TWG on quality in adult learning.

Aims and target audiences of the report

The overall aim of the report is to contribute to the debate on quality in adult learning and the overall debate on quality in lifelong learning through policy suggestions – highlighted in the policy summary – and draft practical tools, in annex to the report.

The direct target audience for the report is policy-makers involved in adult learning at European, national, regional and local government levels. The report will also be of interest to relevant statutory bodies in Member States and partner countries; the social partners and other stakeholder organisations at local, regional, national and European levels; provider representative organisations and individual providers. The report is presented to the European Commission with the request to promote its dissemination among the intended audiences.

The Thematic Working Group on quality in adult learning

The report is the final and summary output of the TWG on quality in adult learning. The establishment of the *ET2020* work programme gave a mandate for the European Commission to establish, together with Member States, new thematic working groups to work on priority areas¹. Twenty-two countries² chose to participate in this TWG. Key stakeholders including the social partners, relevant European institutions and key national

¹ The term 'Thematic Working Group' is used to mean the grouping of interested countries around a specific theme, on which they have expressed a desire to learn from other interested countries, and the overall European development, and to share their policies and concrete experiences. The *ET2020* work programme emphasises that while the cooperation is about exchanging good practice and peer learning, work should be based on clear work plans and time schedules and produce "clear and visible outputs" that can be easily disseminated and that provide Member States with practical and useful tools to guide their policy work.

² AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, GR, HU, IT, LU, LV, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK, UK, HR, TR, NO.

stakeholders completed the membership of the TWG³. Further countries participated in the peer learning activities (PLA), along with individual experts.

The members of the TWG formed three sub-groups to focus on three key quality areas, namely: accreditation of providers of adult learning opportunities; staff quality; and indicators. Guidance and validation formed transversal themes. The working methods of the TWG comprised: plenary meetings; sub-group discussions to produce the toolbox of draft instruments for policy-makers / other stakeholders; and PLAs on the sub-group quality areas. The facilitation of the TWG work was based on a participatory leadership approach which harnessed diversity, built community, and created individual and collective commitment and shared responsibility for decisions, actions and concrete outcomes.

The TWG liaised on an on-going basis with the parallel TWG on financing adult learning. The Core Groups for each TWG came together in July 2013 to review the respective final reports and members of the two TWGs participated in a final conference on quality and financing in Hamburg in October 2013.

Both TWGs were accompanied by parallel studies on quality in adult learning in Europe⁴ and financing adult learning⁵, respectively. These studies provided empirical evidence which made a significant contribution to the development of the reports. In addition, the TWG drew on the findings of the thematic network QALLL⁶. See Annex 3 for further information on the TWG and its work.

Key terminology

The term ‘adult learning’ covers the policy area relating to the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities — both general and vocational — undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training⁷. Adult learning is characterised by its heterogeneity. It covers a wide range of learning activities with a diversity of overarching legislation, policies, governance, structures, priorities, aims, providers, staffing, organisational forms, learning content and learning outcomes.

‘Formal learning’ means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a

³ CEDEFOP; European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA); European Basic Skills Network (EBSN); European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE); European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN); Eurydice; QALLL-Network; representative of the study on quality in adult learning;

⁴ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1). Final report. Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/adult/studies_en.htm.

⁵ FiBs (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Financing the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1). Final report.

⁶ QALLL examined the results and outcomes of LLP-funded centralised and decentralised projects in the Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig actions which focused on quality assurance in VET and adult education, respectively. <http://www.qalll.eu>

⁷ This is how ‘adult learning’ is used in the Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011/C 372/01)

qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education⁸.

The term ‘non-formal learning’ is understood as learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers. Common examples of non-formal learning include: in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills; structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources); and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public⁹.

‘Informal learning’ refers to learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

The terms ‘adult education’ and ‘adult education and training’ are taken to mean general or vocational education provision for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes, and which aims to: provide general education for adults in topics of particular interest to them; provide learning in basic skills and lower and upper secondary education and training which individuals may not have acquired earlier and access to qualifications not gained previously; and / or improve or update knowledge, skills or competences in a specific field¹⁰. Adult education and training is pluralist in structure, multiple partners have a stake in policy-making and implementation and there is a growing drive in countries towards cross-sectoral policy-making and implementation. Adults learn in a wide range of organised provision in schools and adult centres; in VET / CVET institutions; in higher education); in NGOs; in community-based institutions (e.g. museums, libraries); in prisons; in the workplace and independently outside of organised provision.

The TWG’s use of the term ‘quality’ is based on the ISO’s definitions of quality as ‘all characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs’ or ‘the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements’¹¹. The TWG’s interpretation of ‘quality assurance’ is based on the Cedefop definition, namely, ‘activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that all education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning out-comes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders’¹². Such activities may be achieved

⁸ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01).

⁹ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)/

¹⁰ Cedefop (2008) Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms.

¹¹ Cedefop (2011) Glossary. Quality in education and training.

¹² Cedefop (2011) Glossary cit.

through ‘a recognisable repertoire of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools, verification instruments, and mechanisms’¹³.

Definitions of other terms used by the TWG, such as ‘staff’; ‘accreditation’; ‘indicators’, are given as the terms arise in the report.

Key understandings

The TWG worked from an understanding that all definitions of quality – in whatever area - are context-bound in terms of place, topic under discussion, expectations and purpose. Thus, quality is not just a technical issue but has strong political, social and cultural dimensions relating to the explicit and implicit economic, social, cultural, political and individual purposes of the learning of adults in a region or country at any given time¹⁴.

The TWG was also conscious that whatever approach to quality / quality assurance is adopted will reflect the underlying values, mission, goals, aims and objectives of the system and outcomes to which it refers¹⁵. Thus, it is important to state at the outset that the TWG considered learner-centredness to be at the heart of quality adult education and training provision with its implicit focus on: enabling equitable access, in particular for vulnerable groups, through outreach, guidance and other enabling measures; supporting participation and relevant learning through needs analysis, validation of prior learning and individual learning plans; supporting learner ‘persistence’ through flexible provision of appropriate learning opportunities and guidance and support as required; ensuring the effectiveness of the learning experience, including through supporting learners to make efficient and effective use of their time, effort and financial investment (as applicable) and facilitating relevant outcomes; recognising achievement through providing access to flexible assessment and qualifications; facilitating progression through guidance and links to relevant progression opportunities in education and training, in the labour market and / or in the community.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. Quality in adult education and training

A starting point for a consideration of quality in adult learning is to be found in four core dimensions of quality as defined in 2009 in a publication of the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning¹⁶, namely: **equity** which relates to equitable access to and participation in, education and training; **efficiency** which relates to levels and distribution of resources and to economical investment of resources to achieve specified aims under given conditions, that is, the ratio of costs to benefits; **effectiveness** which generally expresses means-end relationships in terms of educational outcomes for

¹³ Faurschou, K. (Ed.) (2002) Quality management approaches for vocational education and training. Cedefop European Forum on Quality in VET.

¹⁴ GHK (2010) Background Report, Workshop on quality in adult learning. Brussels, 30th June – 1st July 2010.

¹⁵ GHK (2010) Background Report cit.

¹⁶ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. 2009. Global Report on Adult Learning. Hamburg: UIL

learners, and the time needed to achieve them; **relevance** which means that provision must represent an effective route to and support for, personal and social change.

A useful approach is also offered by recent research, which identifies three components of quality in education and training¹⁷: **quality of structure** which focuses on the broad framework of the quality approach, namely, organisational and resource issues; **quality of process** which focuses on the internal activities, such as teaching and learning; **quality of result** which focuses on the outcomes of the learning activities. While quality of the outcomes is the real objective, quality is essentially generated and maintained by the first two components. Quality of process concerns all aspects of the 'learner journey' including access, guidance, need analysis, induction, learning content, teaching / learning processes, learning and practical supports, assessment, qualifications, progression and evaluation mechanisms. The quality of structure facilitates the quality of process, which, in turn, should lead to quality outcomes.

Other research suggests that for adult learning opportunities to achieve a minimum level of quality at provider level, the following conditions must be met: learner-centred needs assessment is a starting point; there are opportunities for the acquisition of multiple competences; the learning environment is rich and supportive; provision is tailor-made; the knowledge and experience of the adult are a resource in the learning process; staff have adequate competence and upskilling opportunities; provision is flexible; prior and new learning are validated / certificated as appropriate; guidance is available at all stages of the learner's journey¹⁸.

2.2. Rationale for the focus on quality in adult learning

Better quality throughout education and training is a priority of *ET2020*, and many drivers are pushing the quality agenda. Fiscal constraints call for better returns on investment and greater accountability¹⁹; devolution and deregulation require the systematic measurement of learner outcomes²⁰; and in the marketplace quality labels are frequently used as a marketing tool, thus creating consumer expectations that need to be met. Quality assurance is also a major component in qualifications frameworks²¹ and in actions for the mobility of learners. Quality in education and training has evolved from a

¹⁷ Faurschau, K (Ed.) (2008) Systematic quality assurance in adult learning, Nordic tiles in a mosaic. Nordic Network Quality in Adult Learning.

¹⁸ Research voor Beleid (2005) Developing local learning centres and learning partnerships as part of Member States' targets for reaching the Lisbon goals in the field of education and training. A study of the current situation.

¹⁹ The TWG on financing adult learning addressed this issue.

²⁰ Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying Document to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Delivering Lifelong Learning For Knowledge, Creativity And Innovation" Draft 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the "Education & Training 2010 Work Programme" ; Keogh, H. (2009) The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning.

²¹ Cf. the principles of quality assurance in the EQF Recommendation, cit.

situation where individual teachers were responsible for the quality of processes and outcomes to being a high priority for a wide range of stakeholders²².

There are however specific reasons to address the issue of quality in adult learning (in parallel with the issue of financing adult learning). In many countries adult learning is not a well-defined sector with an explicit strategy and it appears as the weakest link in national lifelong-learning systems²³. Adult learning is addressed by a great diversity of policies, legislative frameworks, structures, governance arrangements and funding mechanisms. There is a wide range of priorities, learning contexts, providers, organisational forms, learning content, learner supports and learning outcomes. Adequate financing is a challenge in many countries. Besides, participation continues to fall, from 9.8 % of the 25-64 year-old population in 2005 to 8.9% in 2011²⁴, thus making the *ET2020* target of 15 % participation by 2020 an ever greater challenge.

A concern common to many countries is the quality of adult learning staff. A 2008 report²⁵ identified the patchy nature of adult learning professionals' initial and continuing professional development and their poor occupational status and career opportunities. A variety of educational pathways leads to the profession and in many countries there is no clear view on the standard competences needed by adult learning staff to fulfil their professional tasks.

2.3. European-level policy context

European-level developments on quality in education and training go back some decades. More recently *EU2020*²⁶ which has the challenge of shaping the EU's response to the global economic and financial crisis provides the policy framework for developments in the economy, employment, education and training, research and social inclusion. The strategy relies heavily on high quality education and training to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It thus underscores the second strategic objective of *ET2020*²⁷: improving the quality and efficiency of education and training.

2.3.1. Policy on the quality of adult learning opportunities

Quality in adult learning has been explicitly on the EU-level agenda since the 2006 Communication on adult learning which emphasised that improvements in the delivery of adult learning are essential to raise participation and ensure quality learning outcomes. In the follow-on Action Plan on adult learning (2007), Priority Action 2: to improve the quality of provision, focused mainly on adult learning staff as the key determinant of

²² Background Report on Workshop on quality in adult learning organised by the Commission in Brussels on 30 June – 1 July 2010.

²³ Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning, 2011/C 372/01.

²⁴ See: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Lifelong_learning_statistics

²⁵ Research voor Beleid (2008) ALPINE: Adult learning professions in Europe. A study of the current situation, trends and issues. Final report.

²⁶ European Commission (2010) Communication on EUROPE 2020, 'A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth COM(2010) 2020'

²⁷ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02).

quality in adult learning. As follow-on from the 2008 study on adult learning professionals in Europe²⁸, the Commission launched a study on key competences for adult learning professionals. The resultant competence profile²⁹ is an overarching profile of competences with layers of context that embrace adult learning in all its forms and settings – see Annex 1. 3.

In 2011 the renewed European agenda for adult learning³⁰ invited Member States to: develop quality assurance for adult-learning providers, for example by means of accreditation systems, taking into account already existing frameworks / standards; and improve the quality of adult education staff, by, for instance, defining competence profiles and establishing effective systems for initial and continuing professional development. *Rethinking Education* (2012)³¹, calls on countries to revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions. The accompanying Staff Working Document on the teaching professions³² makes the point that “in settings where attendance is not compulsory, such as adult learning, teaching must be of sufficient quality to attract and retain learners.”

2.3.2. Policy and instruments for quality in schools, vocational education and training and higher education

In 2000, indicators for measuring the **quality of school education** were developed³³. They can be used to identify issues in schools which should be examined in greater detail. Attainment indicators cover progress in mathematics, reading and ICTs. Outcome and transition indicators include: school drop-out rates and completion of upper secondary education. Quality evaluation in school education was the subject of a Recommendation adopted by the Council and the European Parliament the following year³⁴.

The adoption of the Council and Parliament Recommendation on the establishment of a **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training** in 2009 (usually referred to as EQAVET, which is the name of its implementation network) created a new legislative basis for promoting co-operation

²⁸ Research voor Beleid (2008) ALPINE cit.

²⁹ Research voor Beleid (2010) Key competences for adult learning professionals Contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals. Final report. See Annex 1. 3.

³⁰ Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning, (2011/C 372/01).

³¹ European Commission (2012), *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*, COM(2012)669 final.

³² European Commission (2012) Staff Working Document: Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes.

³³ European Commission (2000), *European Report of May 2000 on the Quality of School Education: Sixteen Quality Indicators*. Report based on the work of the Working Committee on Quality Indicators.

³⁴ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2001 on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education, (2001/166/EC), OJ L 60/51 of 1.3.2001.

between countries on quality assurance in VET³⁵. While respecting the principle of subsidiarity, EQAVET targets system and provider levels with a toolbox of common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators within an overarching quality assurance reference framework, which may be selected and applied in accordance with national / provider requirements. EQAVET has a direct impact on quality in adult learning, as it also covers continuing vocational education and training (CVET).

Quality assurance is at the heart of efforts to build a coherent European Higher Education Area. The **European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG) on quality assurance³⁶ comprise: principles for higher education institutions' internal quality assurance³⁷; standards for the external evaluation of higher education institutions by quality assurance agencies; standards applying to the quality assurance agencies themselves. The ESG constitute a common reference to be interpreted in the context of countries, institutions and disciplines.

The main responsibility for quality in higher education rests with institutions themselves which under the ESG are required to develop and use internal quality assurance systems³⁸ which should cover areas such as: policy and procedures for quality assurance; programmes and awards; assessment of students; teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information systems; and public information.

The standard in relation to the quality assurance of teaching staff, for example, requires institutions to have in place recruitment and appointment procedures and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to ensure the standard is reached³⁹. Significantly, a recent report identified that pedagogical training and continuous up-skilling of higher education teaching staff is still the exception in Europe⁴⁰. Accordingly, the report recommends the professionalisation of teacher training in higher education and that certified pedagogical training for all teaching staff be introduced by 2020. Public authorities should ensure the existence of a sustainable, well-funded framework to support institutions' efforts in this regard.

2.3.3. Lifelong guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

Lifelong guidance and the validation of non-formal and informal learning are central to the quality of adult learning in that they enable and support access, participation and progression, issues which are intrinsic to quality in the field. Good guidance also strongly contributes to the quality and efficiency of the learning system by supporting learners in

³⁵ 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 (2009/c 155/01).

³⁶ ENQA (2009), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, Helsinki: ENQA.

³⁷ Quality assurance as promoted by the providers of higher education themselves.

³⁸ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (2006/143/EC)

³⁹ ENQA (2008), Quality Procedures in the EHEA and Beyond, 2nd ENQA Survey.

⁴⁰ High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2013) Report of the European Commission on improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions.

choosing the appropriate opportunities and reducing the risk of drop-outs. The 2008 Council Resolution⁴¹ on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong-learning strategies highlighted the importance of guidance as a continuous process that enables individuals at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their life paths in learning, work and other settings.. The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) addresses the development of quality assurance systems for guidance services. A long-term aim of ELGPN is to further elaborate the meta-criteria for quality assurance included in the EU common reference tools on lifelong guidance by examining possibilities for European Guidelines for lifelong guidance systems.

Validation⁴², along with guidance, is a key element of the European Guide on improving participation in and awareness of, adult learning⁴³. The renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) invites countries to focus on: putting in place fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting their use by adults, as well as by enterprises and other organisations. Priority 4 of *Rethinking Education*⁴⁴ calls for one-stop shops to integrate lifelong learning services such as validation and career guidance. The December 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁴⁵ recommended that countries should have in place, no later than 2018, arrangements which enable individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences validated and, if applicable, to obtain a full or partial qualification, on the basis of validation.

2.3.4. *The use of indicators to monitor education and training*

The use of indicators in education and training policy co-operation intensified during the roll-out of the Lisbon Agenda in the period 2000 – 2010 and a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks was set up to advise the European Commission on the use of indicators and benchmarks. The Standing Group continues to work on the development of indicators in education and training in the context of the ET2020 objectives. As far as adult learning is concerned, research confirms that there is a need to improve the quality and comparability of data⁴⁶, in general and to serve for indicators.

⁴¹ Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, 21 November 2008.

⁴² ‘Validation of learning’ is defined as a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: i) identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual; ii) documentation to make visible the individual's experiences; iii) a formal assessment of these experiences; and iv) certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification. Cf. Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01).

⁴³ European Commission (2012), European Guide. Strategies for improving participation in and awareness of adult learning.

⁴⁴ European Commission (2012), *Rethinking Education* cit.

⁴⁵ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01).

⁴⁶ National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2010) Final report for: Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector.

2.4. The national policy and practice context

National and regional authorities play a crucial role in the governance of adult learning for accountability at systems and provider levels through, for example, establishing regulatory frameworks, setting quality standards, certifying adherence to these standards and making information on provider performance against explicit indicators available to service users or setting staff requirements at national level and developing opportunities for initial and further training of staff⁴⁷. In some countries attention to quality in adult learning goes back a number of decades and well-established systems, models and approaches are in place.

Not all aspects of adult learning are subject to the same regulation. Public authorities are more interested in the quality of provision when public funding is involved. Thus the public quality focus is primarily on ‘second-chance’ provision, adult initial and continuing vocational education and training provision, adult learning in higher education and on non-formal adult provision in receipt of public funding. Apart from a public concern for the rights of employees (in the case of workplace training) and consumers (in the case of privately provided opportunities not supported by public funding), vocational training within the workplace and adult learning opportunities provided by private providers - community-based, commercial and others - are generally beyond the quality assurance reach of public authorities.

2.4.1. Overall quality picture in adult learning in Europe

A study on quality in adult learning in Europe⁴⁸ (the 2013 study on quality), carried out in parallel and to some extent interacting with the activities of the TWG, identified that the main challenge is the fragmented approach to quality assurance in adult learning. Fragmentation does not necessarily lead to a lack of quality as such, but it makes it difficult to stimulate quality development.

Other challenges include: the lack of attention to adult specific elements in quality systems for formal learning, for instance higher education; insufficient requirements in relation to adult learning staff; the limited availability of guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the lack of monitoring data.

These challenges are more striking in some countries than others, but they apply in all countries to some extent. Many countries are currently developing or revising their legislative framework for adult learning, putting more focus on quality assurance mechanisms and in recent years, many have produced white papers, communications, policy proposals and lifelong learning strategies which emphasise the importance of quality assurance⁴⁹.

The 2013 study on quality identified three clusters of countries on the basis of their quality approaches in formal and non-formal adult learning:

⁴⁷ Keogh, H. (2009) The state and development of adult learning and education in Europe, North America and Israel. Regional synthesis report. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning

⁴⁸ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality in the Adult Learning Sector (Lot 1). Final report.

⁴⁹ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

- (1) Countries that have quality systems in place at macro level for adult learning, formal as well as non-formal (such as AT, BE, CH, DK, EE, FI, HU, IE, LU, LV, NO, SE). Most of them are above the average for the *ET2020* benchmarks relating to adult participation in lifelong learning and adults with a higher educational attainment. *Exceptions in relation to achievement on the benchmarks are BE, HU and IE (on lifelong learning participation only).*
- (2) Countries that have a number of fragmented quality systems at macro level for non-formal adult learning, while having quality systems in place for formal adult learning (such as DE, EL, ES, CZ, IS, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, UK).
- (3) Countries with no or limited quality systems in place on macro level for non-formal learning, while having quality systems in place for formal adult learning (such as BG, CY, FR, HR, IT, LT, RO, SK, TK). Most of these countries have relatively low performance on the *ET2020* benchmarks for participation in lifelong learning and adults with a higher educational attainment.

Of course, participation in lifelong learning is also determined by factors other than the quality of provision, but a comprehensive approach to quality appears to have a positive effect.

2.4.2. Quality systems in formal and non-formal adult learning

The procedural focuses of quality assurance systems in formal and non-formal adult learning have many elements in common. In general, the organisational issues addressed are similar (including mission statement, organisational structure / management, staffing, administration, finance, establishment of a quality plan, physical infrastructure / equipment). In addition, quality assurance processes generally tend to include application, assessment, and monitoring/renewal. However, in the formal sector, more emphasis is usually placed on the quality of the teaching / learning programme than in the non-formal sector, due to the fact that the former programmes generally lead to a formal, state-regulated qualification⁵⁰.

2.4.2.1. Assuring quality in formal adult learning

The 2013 study on quality found that the public provision of adult learning is for the most part integrated into the public system of initial education, at basic, secondary, and tertiary level and the same quality approaches and standards as in initial education apply. Usually, no specific principles, criteria or indicators referring to adult learning / adults are found in such systems, procedures or requirements. Hence, it is up to the institutions themselves to make specific reference to adult learning in their quality plans.

In 2011 nineteen countries⁵¹ reported having devised a national quality assurance approach in line with EQAVET and a further ten countries⁵² were preparing one⁵³. Adults learning in VET, therefore, come under these national quality approaches.

⁵⁰ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

⁵¹ AT; DE; EE; EL; FI; FR; IE; LV; LT; LU; MT; NL; PL; PT; RO; SE; and UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

⁵² BE (FL), BE (FR), BL, CY; CZ; DK; ES; HU; IT; NO; SK; SI; and the UK (Scotland)) .

⁵³ EQAVET data presented at the EQAVET 4th Annual Forum, Dublin. 2013.

Similarly, adults in higher education are covered by measures aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for higher education in each country.

2.4.2.2. Assuring quality in non-formal adult learning

The 2013 study on quality found that quality in non-formal adult learning, i.e. outside the institutional system, is not usually addressed by authorities through policies or frameworks and quality measures often depend on bottom-up initiatives (e.g. codes of conducts and sectoral quality labels) by the sector or providers themselves. The quality seal and code of conduct developed for ‘popular universities’ in the Netherlands is an example of a **sector-led initiative**. Common features of such labels are their voluntary nature, their strong role in relation to consumer protection and marketing and their potential role in satisfying requirements for receiving public funding. For privately-funded adult education, consumer satisfaction is an important driver for quality assurance, since the laws of the market mean that providers can be penalised directly by complaints or negative publicity from clients. In addition to grassroots initiatives, providers of non-formal learning opportunities may also apply some form of quality assurance model such as ISO, EQM, TQM or EFQM⁵⁴.

Where non-formal adult learning provision receives public funding a range of external public quality assurance approaches - accreditation systems, inspection / reviews unrelated to accreditation, regulatory frameworks and licences - is in place in a number of countries, as shown by examples below.

In Hungary and Norway non-formal adult learning providers are **accredited by law**. In **Hungary**, following recent reforms, every provider of adult learning opportunities (formal and non-formal) is obliged to undergo a common accreditation process.

In **Sweden** and **UK (Wales)** non-formal adult learning providers are **inspected and reviewed** (without accreditation).

The **Swedish National Council for Adult Education** is responsible for developing and monitoring popular and liberal adult education. The state defines the purpose of governmental grants while objectives are set independently by the liberal education providers. The state exercises control through reviews, assessments and development carried out by the National Inspectorate Agency.

Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Wales carries out inspection of publicly-funded adult community learning (ACL). The work of the Inspectorate has a key role in maintaining and improving the quality of ACL.

In **Denmark** quality requirements are implicitly stated in **regulatory frameworks**. Legislation on peoples’ enlightenment (“folkeoplysning”) covers day folk high schools and the university extension. Although the section on university extension activities does not mention quality directly, it sets the rules and defines the structures for the educational activities, along with a description of the conditions for receiving public support.

In **Lithuania** requirements regarding the provision of non-formal adult education are included in the Education Law. Educational institutions are entitled to implement non-formal adult education programmes without obtaining a licence, but other legal and / or

⁵⁴ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

natural persons who are not registered in the Educational Institution Register, need a **licence** to practise from the local municipalities.

In **Romania**, the certification and assessment process in adult education is stated in the legislation and is based on a set of assessment standards for each qualification described in the National Register of Qualifications which currently aims at becoming compatible with the National Qualification Framework. The learning acquired in non-formal or informal context could also be assessed and validated by Local Centres for Assessment of Competences.

2.4.3. Country examples related to specific themes addressed by the TWG

The 2013 study on quality and the three TWG peer learning activities (PLAs) identified country-level examples of practice related to the TWG priority themes. In addition, the QALLL-Network⁵⁵ brought together the results of multilateral projects on quality issues funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme Grundtvig (adult education) and Leonardo da Vinci (VET) strands. Most of the projects identified by QALLL aimed at raising the skills and competences of staff⁵⁶. Seven projects⁵⁷ on accreditation were identified as good practice. Many of the selected projects⁵⁸ focused on indicators and quality criteria. For information on QALLL projects see Annex 4.

The TWG held PLAs on the three priority themes for which it drafted a toolbox of practical tools. Each PLA discussed a number of national practices, some of which are mentioned below by way of example.

In Austria, the **accreditation**⁵⁹ system for providers of adult learning opportunities is a response to a specific situation.

The Austrian Ö-Cert addresses a diversity of providers of adult learning with many different, often regionally developed, quality labels. Ö-Cert was set up to improve transparency regarding the quality of adult education providers for customers, learners and public authorities. To be awarded an Ö-Cert, providers must hold one of the valid quality management systems or quality assurance procedures listed on the Ö-Cert website. Ö-Cert only recognises quality management systems which include an external audit and have a limited validity period. Apart from having a valid QMS, providers must fulfil general basic requirements concerning organisation, offers, quality assurance and

⁵⁵ Cf. <http://www.qalll.eu>

⁵⁶ AVE-EXEMPLO, CM ProWork, *EMPOWER*, EQUABENCH, EQUAL, Flexi-Path, Peer Review Extended II, Guiding from School to Job, QUALC, QUALIVET, QVETIS, Reflect OR, REVIMP, SEALLL

⁵⁷ ACT-NET, DASVENT, EQUASS, EXPERO2EU, QVETIS, RECALL, TQP-EU

⁵⁸ Including ACT-NET, Development of a Validation Framework for Mentoring, EGUIDE, EMPOWER, EQUASS in Practice, EFA, EXPERO2EU, GEMS, AQOR, Peer Review Extended II, Peer Review in Initial VET, QUALC, QA in YCC, QUALIVET, QVETIS, QWVET, RECALL, EQM, Reflect OR, REVIMP.

⁵⁹ On accreditation as a driver driving force for improving quality cf. Cedefop (2011) 'Assuring quality in vocational education and training The role of accrediting VET providers' http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3061_en.pdf

compliance with democratic and ethical principles. Benefits of Ö-Cert include its light-touch administration and the fact that, at only 100 Euro, application costs for an Ö-CERT accreditation are low and therefore do not present a financial barrier for small organisations. (cf. <http://oe-cert.at/>.)

Estonia is one of the few countries in Europe where the **profession of ‘adult educator’** is formally recognised and regulated⁶⁰. In **Estonia** the profession of ‘adult educator’ has been recognised and regulated since 2004. The adult educator’s occupational qualification standards are at Levels 5 - 8 on the NQF and are, thus, aligned with EQF. Application for a qualification standard is voluntary and the process comprises portfolio compilation, examination and interview. The right to award an adult educator qualification rests with the Estonian Association of Estonian Adult Educators, ANDRAS. To date, 363 professional adult educator certificates have been issued.

In **Romania**, the recent National Education Law (2011) provides for induction training and continuous professional development for adult education practitioners. A public debate on the professionalisation of adult educators, based on a survey which identified the field-related demand for initial and continuous training for adult practitioners, was prompted by the project ProALPs promoted by the Institute for Adult Education Timisoara in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Observatory for Lifelong Learning⁶¹.

In **Norway** the majority of the teachers of adult basic skills do not hold a professional qualification in the area, although most of them are qualified teachers in general education. To address the quality of basic skills practitioners in **Norway** a training model comprising part-time non-formal further training was created for their professional development. The non-formal training began in 2007 and is delivered free of charge through a series of short seminars. The non-formal training began in 2009 in co-operation with higher education and is worth 30 ECTS points⁶².

Validation also has a role in the professionalisation of adult learning staff. In **Austria** the Academy of Continuing Education (wba), an institution for the qualification of adult educators, enables those participating in its certification process to gain a widely recognised qualification. wba acknowledges previously acquired qualifications and offers guidance on the acquisition of missing skills. Practical experience in the field of adult education is a prerequisite for certification. While wba does not offer further education programmes, it accredits suitable offers organised by various adult education institutes throughout Austria⁶³. In order to be able to conclude a quality assurance agreement with wba, providers must hold an Ö-Cert. The agreement remains in force for the duration of the provider’s Ö-Cert certification.

⁶⁰ Based on information presented at the TWG PLA in Romania, April 2013.

⁶¹ Cf. www.proalps.ro.

⁶² Based on information provided at the TWG PLA in Malta, May 2013.

⁶³ Based on information presented at the TWG PLA in Austria, February 2013.

The diverse landscape, comprising organisations with different objectives, different modes of delivery, different funding, diverse participants, target groups, types of outcomes and results means that monitoring adult learning on a clear set of **indicators** is difficult overall, and even more difficult for non-formal adult learning. A 2010 survey of national data sources⁶⁴ confirmed that the diversity of adult learning systems in countries is matched by diversity in the number, type, coverage and robustness of data sources. Some countries collect few or no data beyond those required at European level; others have sophisticated survey data systems⁶⁵. As anticipated, data on the inputs and, to a lesser extent, the processes of adult learning – particularly participation in formal learning and training at work – were found to be the most sufficient at both the European and country levels. In general, data relating to the outcomes of adult learning are insufficient for monitoring purposes.

Slovenia provides an example of an approach to the use of indicators to monitor adult education.

In **Slovenia**, the OQEA model (in operation since 2001) provides guidance to educational organisations on self-evaluation and the search for development pathways. OQEA can be employed for the self-evaluation of the entire educational organisation or of one programme, department or educational group.

OQEA is currently in a process of renewal and by the end of 2013 indicators will have national-level defined standards and criteria created for the purpose of external evaluation and accreditation.

Countries have made progress in strengthening the role of **guidance** in their national lifelong learning and employment strategies and policies and improving access to services, including for adults. Many countries have established national guidance policy fora or similar coordination mechanisms (currently to be found in 33 countries) to enhance cross-sectoral and multi-professional network-based cooperation and dialogue. In many countries the professional development of guidance practitioners in education and in unemployment services has been at the centre of policy action⁶⁶. Governments have been widening access to guidance through more diverse service delivery, including cost-efficient online services and tools and have made a clear commitment to reducing inequalities between groups by improving guidance provision for at-risk groups.

A key concern is the extent to which improved access to guidance services supports the achievement of national education-training and labour market goals so countries have been improving their evidence-base to verify the contribution that guidance makes at individual, economic and societal levels.

Validation of prior learning is a critical element in the quality of adult learning in terms of motivation, access, persistence and progression.

⁶⁴ National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2010) Final report for: Study on European Terminology in Adult Learning for a common language and common understanding and monitoring of the sector.

⁶⁵ National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2010) Final report cit.

⁶⁶ Cedefop (2011) Working Paper No 11, Lifelong guidance across Europe: reviewing policy progress and future prospects.

In **Malta** a Sector Skills Committee and sector skills units were established under 2012 legislation on validation. The Sector Skills Committee is charged with: formulating policies and procedures to govern the sector skills units; developing criteria and standards for validation; providing guidelines for the assessment of skills and competences for the purpose of granting awards; and providing guidelines for quality assurance in non-formal learning.

The sector skills units are responsible for: proposing occupational standards relevant to the sector and mechanisms for the validation of non-formal / informal learning; developing and maintaining a sectoral qualifications framework referenced to the MQF; providing guidance to persons applying for validation. The sector skills units are also responsible for: undertaking assessments for validating non-formal / informal learning; auditing assessment processes and the results achieved; There are now 14 sector skills units and to date occupational standards have been developed for the childcare, printing and auto-repair sectors⁶⁷.

In **France**, validation of prior learning has a long history and was further reinforced by a 2002 law, which established the National Certification Register, a dedicated commission which validates the conformity of these certifications, and the amended prior learning validation system. The same law conferred individual rights in relation to validation and ensured that certification achieved through validation has the same status as that achieved through training. Validation is based on professional skills gained after three years of salaried, non-salaried or voluntary experience. Guidance is a key element of validation. The state pays the cost of validation for unemployed people. For employees, the cost is covered by rights accumulated throughout working life. There is a mix of funding for ‘in-between’ cases; otherwise, the individual pays between 600 - 2000 Euro. Of 250,000 people undergoing validation in recent times, only 100 paid their own costs⁶⁸.

3. TWG OUTCOMES: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

The TWG aimed at suggesting ways to European and national policy-makers to carry forward the quality agenda in adult learning and, ultimately, across the whole lifelong learning spectrum, as well as at producing a toolbox of (draft) instruments to provide guidance on how to pursue practical improvements.

3.1. The argument for and against an overarching reference framework for quality in adult learning

To begin with, the TWG discussed the option of proposing a quality assurance reference framework specifically for adult learning. The focus would be on those areas – such as basic skills provision, second chance provision and liberal adult learning – not covered by the existing EQAVET, European Standards and Guidelines, or initial education frameworks.

⁶⁷ Based on a presentation delivered at the PLA in Malta, May 2013.

⁶⁸ Based on a presentation delivered at the PLA in Malta, May 2013.

Such a specific framework could accommodate the specificities and challenges of adult learning not easily or generally catered for by existing frameworks, with particular reference to non-formal adult learning offered by diverse and frequently small providers.

Such a dedicated framework would also promote or provide⁶⁹:

- a logical structure in which to locate the toolbox of draft instruments produced by the TWG;
- a common “quality language” in adult learning which makes it possible to arrive at common understandings, create a quality culture and communicate directly with stakeholders at all levels;
- a common point of reference to ensure consistency, transparency and mutual trust among stakeholders, generally and specifically in relation to inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of education and training;
- a systemic approach to quality, covering and connecting the relevant levels and actors and supporting planning, implementation, evaluation and review / revision of processes and outcomes;
- systematic monitoring through the use of measurement tools with an opportunity for review and quality improvement;
- an innovation-friendly flexible instrument, broad enough to fit with existing national and organisational systems without imposing a given operational approach and specific procedures;
- a basis for further development through co-operation at European, national, regional and local levels.

However, TWG members were also aware of the downside of proposing a new and separate quality assurance reference framework for adult learning. Many elements of the EQAVET and ESG models and processes appear to have applicability to the quality assurance of adult learning⁷⁰, and a new framework would involve ‘re-inventing the wheel’ to an extent. It could also appear to go against the spirit of the renewed agenda for adult learning which calls on countries to take into account existing quality frameworks and standards in other sectors when developing quality assurance approaches for providers of adult learning opportunities.

3.2. The potential of existing quality reference frameworks for quality assurance in adult learning

Being aware of recent research findings on the issue, the TWG examined the potential of existing quality reference frameworks for VET and higher education for quality assurance in adult learning taking place outside those two fields.

⁶⁹ See: www.eqavet.eu; <http://www.qalll.eu>; Panteia (2013);

⁷⁰ See Panteia (2013) and general evidence from <http://www.qall.eu>

3.2.1. EQAVET

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET⁷¹) envisages a four-step cycle for quality assurance and improvement and a toolbox of common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators applicable at systems and provider levels. Covering all VET, it already applies to adults in continuing vocational education and training (CVET).

The results of the QALLL thematic network show that there are more similarities than differences between quality in VET and quality in adult education⁷². In addition, the 2013 study on quality⁷³ identified that the quality approaches in many of the 15 in-depth case studies on quality presented in the study share basic principles very much aligned with developments in EQAVET, including a cycle resembling the four-step ‘pdca’⁷⁴ cycle. Although the learning environment might be different, the procedures and structures needed to guarantee that it is of high quality are generally the same and focus on transparency in the objectives and strategy of the organisation, the quality of support structures, clear communication, quality of staff, involvement of stakeholders, and feedback loops to continuously improve quality. Significantly, the 2013 study on quality made a clear recommendation regarding the appropriateness of the EQAVET model and processes for quality assurance in adult learning.

Furthermore, 2012 research on the implementation of EQAVET at national level⁷⁵ indicates that the National Reference Points (NRPs) are providing information and support in relation to quality to formal and non-formal adult learning stakeholders in many countries.

However, despite these positive indications of the potential of the EQAVET for quality assurance of adult learning, TWG members were aware that the EQAVET framework was specifically addressing vocational education and training.

Moreover, recent research⁷⁶ indicates that qualitative indicators in relation to access and to the satisfaction rates of learners (and employers) are among the less frequently used EQAVET indicators. In addition, the value of the soft skills and general education of learners (which increase their employability and are of key importance in much of adult learning provision) is not reflected in the EQAVET indicators⁷⁷. Finally, a study of

⁷¹ The legal basis (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009) 2009/C 155/01) establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, without indicating any brand name (such as Europass) or acronym (such as EQF). The name of the implementation network – EQAVET – is commonly used to refer to the whole process.

⁷² QALLL Project (2013) QALLL Contribution to the TWG on Quality in Adult Learning: Products of QALLL Good Practice Projects.

⁷³ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector: Quality cit.

⁷⁴ “Plan, do, check, act”.

⁷⁵ EQAVET (2013) Report 4th Annual Forum, Dublin 14-15 March 2013.

⁷⁶ Cedefop (2012) Working Paper No 16. Trends in VET policy in Europe 2010-12. Progress towards the Bruges communiqué.

⁷⁷ As indicated in the EQAVET (2013) Report 4th Annual Forum, Dublin 14-15 March 2013.

twenty-six measures on quality assurance in CVET in ten countries⁷⁸ highlighted that quality criteria were employed that do not exist in EQAVET, namely criteria in relation to transparency and guidance for learners; client request management; social responsibility; infrastructure and equipment. The TWG considered these criteria to have particular significance for adult learning.

All in all, therefore, TWG members considered that at this stage of the development of quality assurance approaches in adult learning there were significant counter-indications for the direct use of the EQAVET framework to quality assure adult learning, which includes a significant share of non-vocational and non-formal learning.

3.2.2. European Standards and Guidelines

While they were developed specifically for higher education, many features of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), in particular those for ‘internal quality assurance’⁷⁹, provide a conceptual and a methodological reference that also has clear relevance for adult learning providers, independent of the level and institutional setting of their programme. The emphasis on rationalising objectives and aims; internal procedures to quality assure programmes and courses; quality assurance of teaching staff; quality of the learning resources; information systems and transparency and communication, find many resonances in quality as related to adult learning and as pursued by providers.

However, the ESG were clearly developed for the more homogenous and well-established higher education sector, a reality radically different from the fragmented adult learning area, to which they cannot be directly transferred or applied.

3.3. A three-strand approach to quality assurance in adult learning

As seen above, TWG members agreed that creating a separate framework for adult learning was likely to prove an inefficient and possibly counterproductive strategy. While existing quality instruments may not be able to cope with the diversity and cross-sectoral nature of adult learning, they do, nevertheless, provide a basis for further development. In particular, building on the EQAVET model and experience was considered to be worth exploring and advantage could be taken of the findings of the first evaluation of EQAVET, finalised in 2013.

However, action adopting this approach would bring results only in the medium-term (2016-17). Besides, and crucially, this was considered to be a step towards the longer-term development of a comprehensive framework of principles, criteria and guidelines for quality assurance in lifelong learning, which would recognise the many common quality issues across all sectors of education and training, while also catering for their particularities.

Meanwhile, in the immediate- and short-term, the main challenge was considered to be the need to strengthen quality approaches in adult learning, especially non-formal adult learning.

⁷⁸ AT, BE-fr, CZ, FI, FR, DE, IT, EI, NL, UK-England – see Curth, A. (2013) Study on quality assurance in continuous VET and on future development of EQAVET. Scenarios for future EQAVET implementation. Prepared for: 4th Annual Forum of the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) network.

⁷⁹ As seen above, this refers to quality assurance as promoted by the providers themselves.

Eventually, after much discussion an approach based on three **strands of action** appeared to the TWG to be a way of making all these concerns operational. The proposed three strands are as follows:

Strand 1: Action within this strand focuses on **improving and completing** the many quality systems, tools and approaches mainly developed at the level of countries, regions or economic sectors. National quality authorities would be the main promoters of such action, co-operating with the national co-ordinators of the renewed agenda for adult learning and including all relevant stakeholders.

Action should include the further development, testing and application of the toolbox of instruments developed by the TWG and the strengthening of monitoring and data collection. Particular attention should be paid to the quality of non-formal adult learning, which is often not covered by current tools. Action within this strand, based on improving rather than building from scratch, is likely to provide practical results in one or two years.

Partnerships within the programme Erasmus+ could provide a suitable financial and organisational framework for work within Strand 1.

Strand 2: Action within this strand, taken by the European Commission and the relevant national authorities involving the EQAVET network and stakeholders from adult learning and VET, aims to explore how the EQAVET model could be developed in such a way that it can support the **quality of outcomes** of both vocational and non-vocational adult learning, in closer coordination with the provision of lifelong **guidance** and opportunities for **validation** of prior learning. This may lead to implementation of a reformed and extended European quality assurance framework by 2016-17.

Strand 3: In the longer term the relevant adult education, initial education, VET and higher education stakeholders at European and national levels co-operate and collaborate to explore the potential for an overarching **reference framework of principles, criteria and guidelines for lifelong learning quality assurance**, acting as a bridge across education and training sectors and aiming at ensuring the quality of outcomes of all learners and in line with the need to recognise all learning. A target date for a comprehensive lifelong learning quality framework could be 2020.

More specific action points are provided in the policy summary. These strands of action are closely interlinked, and indeed they deliberately converge. Each strand will require the systematic involvement of national and European stakeholders, networks and processes. A dedicated measure within the programme Erasmus+ could be used to fund such activities and the involvement of the relevant stakeholders could be a condition of funding – for example, in parallel with the proposal to use Erasmus+ to support the implementation of the recommendations of the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education in relation to improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou at the launch of the report - see http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-581_en.htm

3.4. The place and function of the TWG toolbox in the three-strand approach

Strand 1 above refers to the short-term, and the TWG actively contributed to it through preliminary proposals for operational tools to improve quality in adult learning. They are not ready-for-use tools, but draft proposals that show the way and call for development and adaptation to different national circumstances. This toolbox comprises a framework for the accreditation of providers; a staff quality checklist along with a staff profiling grid; a list of draft indicators; and specific policy guidance generated by the three PLAs held in 2013⁸¹ in relation to these three topics and to the contribution of guidance and validation to the quality of adult learning

The TWG chose these specific areas for development in response to the challenges facing adult learning policy and provision in many countries as outlined in Section 2.2 above and in response to policy guidance in a range of recent European-level documents and reports as described in Section 2.3.

3.4.1. Outline of a framework for the accreditation of adult learning providers

The TWG understood ‘accreditation’ to mean ‘the formal recognition by an appropriate authority that a body or a person is competent to carry out specific tasks’⁸². In particular, accreditation of providers of adult learning opportunities (often required to practice and typically a precondition for access to public funding) requires that they meet a set of minimum standards and quality criteria, demonstrating sound governance, leadership and management. In developing a draft accreditation framework the TWG sought to address many of the challenges experienced by adult learning providers in relation to: funding; governance; communications; the availability of guidance and validation opportunities; staffing; learner supports; learning outcomes and progression; consumer protection; and self-evaluation systems.

The proposed accreditation framework comprises ten quality criteria or necessary conditions for quality relating to: i) mission and objective; ii) learner orientation; iii) transparency of information on offers and methods; learners’ rights/protection for learners; financing and governance; iv) staff competence; v) human resources (HR) policy; vi) support for learners and staff; vii) infrastructure and resources; viii) documentation of learning; ix) quality management systems; x) relevance and benefits of provision.

For each criterion the framework provides a description and key questions (see Annex 1.1) which ‘unpack’ each quality criterion / necessary condition to provide users with clear guidance on its key elements. For example, under the quality criterion: *the provider is learner- / customer-oriented* the description sets out what that would mean in practice for a provider and learner and the key questions provide guidance and an indication of how that criterion might be met by a provider:

⁸¹ PLA on Accreditation of providers, Austria, February 2013; PLA on the professionalisation of adult learning staff, Romania, April 2013; PLA on the contribution of validation, guidance and the use of indicators to quality in adult learning, Malta, May 2013.

⁸² Cedefop (2009) Accreditation and quality assurance in vocational education and training. Selected European approaches.

Description	Key Questions
<p>The learners are at the centre of provision.</p> <p>The provision and the methods are adapted to the adult target group and their specific needs.</p> <p>A lifelong learning perspective is encouraged.</p>	<p>Are the provision and methodology relevant to the target group and do they meet their needs?</p> <p>Does the provider encourage learners to participate in lifelong learning activities?</p>

In relation to the quality criterion: *supports are available to learner and facilitators* the description and the key questions provide the following guidance:

Description	Key Questions
Administrative procedures	Are administrative procedures well described?
Communication	Is the source of information on provision and administrative issues clear to both learners and facilitators?
Infrastructure	Is the infrastructure in place to support the learning process?
Practical support	Are there additional practical support structures if needed?
Guidance (information and guidance on different possibilities; promotion of career management skills)	Is there a guidance service in place to support the learners in their learning process?

The TWG considered that the accreditation framework could be drawn upon by policy-makers and accrediting bodies to monitor quality at provider level and ensure a minimum standard of quality in adult learning provision. The framework also offers a self-evaluation tool to providers. The TWG recommended that further developing and testing the framework should be carried out in Strand 1 of the three-strand approach outlined above. Funding for this could be sourced at country level and partnerships could also be proposed within the programme Erasmus+ to test and develop the accreditation framework. The experiences of the restricted calls to develop EQF and ECVET funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme provide good models in this regard

The PLA on the accreditation of adult learning providers (Austria, 2013)⁸³ discussed good practices on accreditation from the host country and other countries (CH, NO) and arrived at a number of policy-related conclusions that need to be borne in mind in further developing and implementing the accreditation framework.

⁸³ PLA on accreditation of adult learning providers, Vienna, 21-22 February 2013.

A major conclusion from the PLA was that accreditation of providers is a necessary⁸⁴ but not a sufficient condition for the quality of adult learning. It needs to be part of a wider quality approach. In particular, as it tends to focus on provider inputs rather than learner outcomes, accreditation needs a complementary and balanced focus on the quality of staff and of teaching and learning. Accreditation is largely about transparency, which may indeed promote quality, motivating policy-makers and operators to more actively and deliberately pursue quality. This transparency dimension makes accreditation a particularly interesting issue for European cooperation, building upon the experience gained at national level and through transnational projects.

It should be noted that there is little evidence on the costs and benefits of systems for the accreditation of adult learning providers, many of which were recently introduced⁸⁵.

3.4.2. Staff quality policy checklist and profiling grid

The TWG worked towards a policy checklist for quality assurance of adult learning staff (Annex 1.2) and a profiling grid (Annex 1.3), to begin addressing the particular situation of adult learning staff in many countries⁸⁶.

On the one hand, there is consensus that teachers, trainers and staff such as guidance practitioners and validation personnel are the single most important factor in the quality of adult education and training. On the other hand, while the need for initial and continuing professional training as a teacher at primary and secondary school level is generally taken as a given, when it comes to adult learning (and, indeed, to higher education⁸⁷) there appears to be an assumption that professional teacher training is not necessary. Personnel with teacher training related to the school sector are frequently hired to teach adults without any upskilling in adult-specific teaching methodologies. Occupational status and career prospects are also unattractive and may not retain quality staff.

To begin to address this unsatisfactory situation, the TWG developed a policy checklist for quality assurance of adult learning staff (Annex 1.2). It is envisaged as a starting point for a concrete instrument with relevance for all countries irrespective of their current situation. It focuses on staff in general adult education, that is, second-chance / evening schools; liberal adult education; basic skills and migrant education, with a particular emphasis on the last two. This focus is deliberate, as it fills a gap: the quality of VET staff and HE staff is to a large extent covered by measures and arrangements particular to those sectors.

The checklist covers: i) legal regulations for the qualifications of adult learning staff; ii) regulatory frameworks for the professional development of staff; iii) career paths / pathways leading to the profession; iv) the employment situation of adult learning staff;

⁸⁴ Not all TWG members agreed that the accreditation of providers is necessary as an approach to quality assurance. In particular, this was the view of the TWG member from Finland where accreditation of providers is not used as a quality assurance approach.

⁸⁵ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

⁸⁶ ‘Staff’ here means all personnel engaged in the management and delivery of adult learning opportunities, to include managers, teachers, trainers, tutors, guidance practitioners, outreach personnel and validation staff.

⁸⁷ High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2013).

v) data collection for policy development; vi) systematic and regular promotion of the nature and benefits of adult learning professions; vii) quality assurance and quality management.

The checklist supports the gathering of information under a lengthy list of sub-headings on the above areas in relation to formal and non-formal adult learning staff. The intention is to provide the relevant authorities with a policy tool to self-assess existing policy, structures and systems for staff quality. For example, under the criterion *career paths / pathways leading to the profession*, policy-makers are invited to assess the extent to which the following elements are in place in their country / region:

a.	There is a systematic description of the education system's qualifications leading to the adult learning profession, where all learning achievements are measured and related to each other
b.	Qualifications are compatible with national/ European qualification frameworks
c.	The highest priority in terms of investment is given to in-service training
d.	In-service training is recognised and validated within national qualification frameworks
e.	There are short courses, induction programmes and work-based learning arrangements to support the professionalisation of staff
f.	There is transparency of practices and of the provision of initial and continuing training of staff
g.	Content and processes for initial and continuing training are explicit
h.	Initial training for adult learning staff is provided by adult education organisations (such as employers, adult learning institutions, state agencies etc)
i.	Mechanisms to identify training needs exist
j.	There is continuing professional development for the different professional profiles based on needs and evaluations of previous trainings
k.	There are mechanisms for validation of learning outcomes acquired in Grundtvig and other mobility programmes

The TWG considered that the pooled results of such an assessment at national / regional levels in countries could also be a first step towards establishing a consensus in Europe about the need for further development of policies for professional development of non-vocational adult learning staff. The TWG recommended that the staff checklist be tested as part of national, bilateral / multilateral initiatives during Strand 1 of the three-strand approach, as a stand-alone tool or as part of a broader quality assurance framework for adult learning.

In addition to the checklist on staff quality, the sub-group did preliminary work on a profiling grid (Annex 1.3), from general to sector-specific, for adult learning staff. The rationale for such an approach was based on the integrated approach advocated in the study on key competences for adult learning professionals in Europe⁸⁸ which suggested that “the prevailing distinction between labour market relevant training, vocational training, and enterprise training on the one hand, and non-formal education, non-vocational education on the other” be abolished on the grounds that it is an artificial distinction.

Addressing the need for gap analysis (existing competences in current staff vs. desired competences), and using the staff competence profile proposed by the study on key competences for adult learning professionals, the sub-group worked on a preliminary draft of the profiling grid for provider-level or practitioner-level self-evaluation of the

⁸⁸ Research voor Beleid (2010) Key Competences for adult learning professionals cit.

key competences required by staff working in the various sub-domains of adult learning. The grid seeks to show how different competences have different degrees of importance in different sectors. Used in association with the staff competence profile, the grid could serve as a tool which national authorities could adapt to the very diverse national situations. The idea is that creating **teacher** profiles / typologies should support public authorities and training providers to develop / provide training for unqualified staff and at the same time be in a position to offer validation of non-formal and informal learning to experienced staff lacking a professional qualification to teach adults.

The basic skills section has been partially completed in the draft grid. The sub-group identified that future drafts of the tool could include the possibility of distinguishing three levels of proficiency in each of the desired key competences as follows:

- Level A: expert (can both use the competence and teach it to trainees)
- Level B: autonomous user (can use the competence creatively and confidently without assistance)
- Level C: trainee (is becoming confident in the use of the competence, can assist levels A and B).

Further development of the profiling grid is required and could take place during Strand 1 of the three-strand approach

The PLA on the professionalisation of adult learning staff (Romania, 2013)⁸⁹ examined a number of good practices on the professionalisation of staff from the host country and other countries (EE, GR, IT, NO) and took advantage of input from academic experts.

The PLA arrived at a number of policy-related conclusions to inform national measures to address staff quality. Countries have different priorities in relation to the professionalisation of adult learning staff and this should be taken into account in the development of any European proposals in this regard.

There was a general consensus that work on the ‘professionalisation’ of adult learning staff requires a clearer definition of a common core of characteristics associated with being an ‘adult learning professional’, namely, having competences, qualifications, status, image, self-understanding, income, career perspective, membership of a professional association; collegiality; commitment to continuing development.

A good starting point to raising the quality of adult learning staff would be to define units of competences with a common core and elective competences to take account of different typologies of roles and functions of staff in adult learning. Second-chance provision would be a logical place to start given that it is an area where government responsibility tends to be most clearly delineated.

The diversity of adult learning and adult learning staff means that it would be advisable to focus on developing proposals for professionalisation targeting a range of different scenarios, not necessarily covering the whole spectrum of adult learning. In this context it would be useful to explore the ‘skills council’ approach whereby adult learning professionals have responsibility for their own professional development.

⁸⁹ PLA on the professionalization of adult learning staff, Romania, 10-11 April 2013.

In any move toward professionalisation, the strong non-formal dimension in adult learning creates a need to strike a balance between the advantages of professionalisation and potential threats in terms of over-regulation and over-burdening and the possible exclusion of otherwise adequate practitioners without formal qualifications.

The cost of approaches to the professionalisation of adult learning staff needs to be taken into account in the development of any proposals in this regard.

3.4.3. *Indicators*

In response to the call in the renewed European agenda on adult learning for sufficient baseline data and a strengthened monitoring and impact assessment of adult learning, making better use of existing instruments where possible, the TWG focused on indicators to support system-level monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement in adult learning.

The TWG understood ‘quality criteria’ as the characteristics of an adult learning service that determine whether it meets the express and implied requirements of its stakeholders. ‘Quality indicators’ were understood as statistical measures that give an indication of output quality, although some quality indicators can also give an indication of process quality. ‘Descriptors’ were understood as ‘soft indicators’ that reflect trends for achieving defined objectives⁹⁰.

The TWG draft indicators in the toolbox (Annex 1.4) are presented as a stimulus to debate about adult learning. They are future-oriented in that they present a vision of what the TWG would like to know about adult learning. Further work – conceptual and technical - is required at all levels to develop the proposed indicators and to test how they could be rendered valid, reliable, meaningful and feasible in countries and comparable across countries. This could be undertaken in the short to medium term in the first two strands of the three-strand approach.

The quality criteria proposed focus on: i) quality assurance systems; ii) accessibility of adult learning programmes; iii) quality of staff; iv) availability of information and guidance; v) effectiveness of adult learning programmes; vi) progression rates in adult learning programmes and utilisation of acquired skills; vii) contribution to economic growth; viii) mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market; ix) validation of non-formal and informal learning; x) qualifications system. Each quality criterion is accompanied by key questions, indicators and descriptors.

Raising participation levels is a key quality driver in adult learning. The rationale for including a quality criterion related to the accessibility of adult learning programmes is based on the need to increase participation so as to respond to the many challenges related to skilling, upskilling and reskilling adults, the growing challenges of an ageing population and migration; and the need for the active engagement of citizens with Europe.

The proposed key questions, indicators and descriptors for the quality criterion on the accessibility of adult learning programmes are set out as follows in the draft indicators:

Key Question	Indicator	Descriptor
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⁹⁰ Cedefop (2007) Indicators for quality in VET. To enhance European cooperation.

Is the infrastructure in place to ensure adult learning is accessible?	Rate of accredited providers to population	Steady increase in participation rate over last 5 years
Is provision of adult learning opportunities well distributed over the territory?	Participation rates per region	Increasing range and type of programmes responsive to changing needs
Are the duration and the content	Wide range and types of programmes available	Wide range of diverse programmes available including flexible delivery
Are adult learning opportunities also delivered through distance learning or other flexible forms?		
Is provision accessible to vulnerable groups?	Ratio of vulnerable groups participating in adult learning	Rate of participation by vulnerable groups shows increasing trend.

The contribution of the use of indicators to the quality of adult learning was addressed in the PLA in Malta (May 2013) and participants agreed that a key challenge is to build on existing systems. However, the challenges in identifying, classifying and collecting data on the adult learning sector are considerable. Both quantitative and qualitative data are required to inform the work of policy-makers and practitioners.

To enable collection, harmonisation and comparison of data, conceptual and developmental work, including reaching agreement on terminology, will be crucial and will need to be undertaken in the short to medium term within the three-strand approach. Such developments will need to build on existing data collection approaches and avoid placing undue burdens on countries, an important consideration in the current economic climate where the finite financial resources for measuring and monitoring are more than usually stretched.

3.4.4. Guidance and validation

Lifelong guidance and validation of prior learning formed horizontal themes throughout the work of the TWG and were specifically addressed in the PLA in Malta (May 2013). Various inputs addressed the pivotal role of guidance in societies with high insecurity and challenges in predicting the future demand for skills and competences.

In recognition of the key contribution of guidance and validation to quality in adult learning, the TWG included an indicator on both topics in the draft indicators.

Guidance is a quality criterion because, given the heterogeneous nature of the adult learning area crossed by increasingly flexible pathways, it has become an indispensable dimension of quality provision of adult learning opportunities. The importance of guidance as a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their life paths in learning, work and other settings is widely acknowledged⁹¹. As also stressed in the recent guide to improving

⁹¹ Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies 21 November 2008.

participation in adult learning⁹², outreach should be promptly followed by guidance to support access, self-assessment / needs analysis, individual programme planning, persistence in learning and progression planning, opportunities for which constitute criteria of a quality service. When employment and employability are quality criteria for adult learning outcomes, guidance supports the development of career management skills as a long-term outcome of adult learning.

The proposed key questions, indicators and descriptors for the draft quality criterion on the *availability of information and guidance* include the following:

Key Questions	Indicators	Descriptors
Does a nationally / regionally co-ordinated system of information and guidance for adult learning exist?	Flexible access to information and guidance, including the number of access points in the region	Growing co-ordination of guidance services
Are schemes in place to promote better access to adult learning?	Ratio of access points per head of population	Increasing access to independent information and guidance
Is there an appropriate policy developed for increasing awareness of adult learning?	Number of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually.	Increasing number of users of access points
Can adults avail of a guidance service to support their persistence in and progression from, adult learning programmes and their career management skills?	Proportion of adults with access to an on-going guidance service	Innovative promotional campaigns increasingly available
	Retention rates on adult learning programmes	Growing availability of a guidance service for adults

Validation of prior learning is a quality criterion because adults by definition will have knowledge and skills acquired through education, training and work, volunteering or life experience. Validating this learning can have a major significance for adults in terms of accessing education and training or employment, developing their learning plan and / or shortening the learning pathway to qualifications. Even when prior learning is not converted into credit equivalents, validating it can support career change and progression; inform life projects and increase awareness, motivation and self-confidence. There is a clear link between validation and guidance, as it would be unrealistic for an individual to embark on a validation pathway without the support of guidance, while skills audit allows more targeted guidance.

The proposed key questions, indicators and descriptors for the draft quality criterion on validation are set out as follows in the draft indicators:

Key Questions	Indicators	Descriptors

⁹² European Commission (2012) European Guide. Increasing awareness of and participation in adult learning.

Is there an appropriate system in place to provide adults with the opportunity of having their non-formal and informal learning validated?	Number of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning	Increasing number of accredited facilitators of validation over the last 5 years
Is there a guidance service to support adults seeking validation of non-formal and informal learning?	Number of guidance access points / practitioners per head of population	Increasing number of qualifications achieved through validation of non-formal and informal learning

The PLA in Malta generated lessons on both guidance and validation for adult learning policy-makers and providers. Participants agreed that the availability of guidance and validation, at system and provider levels, is an indispensable dimension of quality adult learning and should form part of quality criteria for the accreditation of providers of adult learning opportunities. A key challenge is to make good use of existing legislative instruments, policy statements and shared experience in relation to guidance and validation to provide adults with quality learning opportunities.

The PLA agreed that all adult learning provision should include validation opportunities, but validation opportunities should also be offered independently of organised provision. To be a quality process, validation must incorporate guidance at all its stages. It should also: include self-assessment of an individual's current competences and readiness for career decision-making; offer options to the individual; be well-documented, be impartial and easily accessible; have links to other stakeholders, including employers and higher education; and be future-oriented in its perspective.

3.4.5. Return on investment in quality assurance

Financing adult learning and, thus, its quality assurance is subject to a number of policy pressures. Every quality and quality assurance approach and system has a cost, financial or otherwise. The provision of an adult learning service that meets minimum quality requirements needs investment by a range of stakeholders which, depending on the financing model of the service, may include public authorities, employers, local communities, providers, staff or learners themselves.

Furthermore, quality assurance systems have to be affordable for providers, both in terms of budget and time spend on assuring quality, or monitoring quality. For adult learning providers in precarious financial situations, such as in non-formal adult learning provision in many countries, finding the resources to engage with external or internal formal quality assurance processes is likely to present a challenge.

The absence of formal quality assurance does not mean an absence of quality; likewise the presence of quality assurance measures does not guarantee quality provision. For example, a recent Cedefop study⁹³ on 26 measures promoting quality assurance in CVET in ten countries found that the cost of implementation of internal quality assurance to

⁹³ Curth, A. (2013) Study on quality assurance in continuous VET and on future development of EQAVET. Scenarios for future EQAVET implementation. Prepared for: 4th Annual Forum of the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) network.

organisations tended to be relatively high while another finding was that using a quality management approach does not guarantee an improved outcome.

The cost of quality assurance systems needs to be seen in relation to the benefits. In theory, quality systems should give rise to rationalising processes in the organisation, leading to quality improvement, better performance and, ultimately, increased learner satisfaction and better learning outcomes. In the case studies identified by the 2013 study on quality in adult learning⁹⁴, stakeholders provided limited evidence about the concrete benefits of quality assurance, e.g. better performance, increasing learner satisfaction and better outcomes. The available evidence mainly indicated that quality assurance helped to rationalise processes and stimulate debates on issues related to quality. This is not surprising since it has been argued that testing the effects of quality assurance instruments is empirically difficult⁹⁵.

However, amid the general concerns about the financing of adult learning and the cost of quality assurance and returns on investment in particular, there is some evidence that quality assurance is paying off⁹⁶, but the underlying empirical evidence needs further exploration, especially in the context of adult learning, as do the cost-benefit of quality assurance systems in general⁹⁷.

As the 2013 study on quality affirmed, “high quality requires financial resources”⁹⁸. Poor quality provision is both wasteful of resources and counter-productive for the achievement of adult learning goals. Therefore, the TWG on financing adult learning gave attention to the issue of ensuring that adequate resources are made available to strengthen and fulfil the quality standards of teaching and learning in adult learning provision. Furthermore, in its agreed series of indicators for investment in system development, the TWG included an indicator for investment in quality as follows:

Financial criterion	Key questions	Indicators
System	Is there an adequate investment in quality	Proportion of public spend on

⁹⁴ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

⁹⁵ One of the main problems, it has been said, is finding good proxies for quality, in order to examine the effects on service quality (Panteia 2013, footnote).

⁹⁶ Panteia (2013); Bertzeletou, T. (2013) Is Quality paying off? Yes, answer VET providers. Presentation at EQAVET 4th Annual Forum, Dublin, 14 – 15 March 2013.

⁹⁷ From Panteia (2013) - To date there are relatively few studies addressing the costs and benefits of quality assurance measures, especially in the field of adult learning. It has been argued that testing the effects of quality assurance instruments, is empirically difficult. One of the main problems is said to be finding good proxies for quality, in order to examine the effects on service quality. There is a vast economic literature on the need for regulating a sector and setting standards, such as accreditation, licensing (and the role of qualifications), conduct regulation, rules on ownership and form of business, and recommended or fixed prices. See: Svorny, S. (2000), ‘Licensing, Market Entry Regulation’, in Bouckaert, B. and G. De Geest (eds), Encyclopedia of Law and Economics, Volume III: The Regulation of Contracts, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, pp. 296-328. Bruno S. Frey (2006). Evaluating - Eine Neue Krankheit CREMA; Behavioural Science; Economics. June 2006.

⁹⁸ Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality cit.

development	assurance systems? <i>Quality assurance systems help ensure efficient use of public and private investment. They also provide re-assurance to customers to invest in adult learning activity – consumer protection and risk minimisation</i>	external and internal quality assurance system Percentage of publicly-funded providers meeting national quality standards
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To fully monitor efficiency and, indeed, effectiveness, further indicators are required to monitor and measure the outcomes for stakeholders – public authorities, social partners, individual learners – of investment in learning. Their development and the development of the necessary database would be an important task for Strand 1 of the three-strand approach.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - TWG TOOLBOX FOR QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

Annex 1.1 Outline of a Framework for the Accreditation of Providers

Quality criteria What are the necessary conditions?	Description In terms of...	Key questions
The provider has a clear mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>objectives</i> • <i>target groups</i> • <i>type of provision/services</i> • <i>understanding of the market</i> • <i>principal stakeholders</i> • <i>lifelong learning perspective</i> 	Are the objectives, target group, type of provision/services, understanding of the market, principal stakeholders and lifelong learning perspective clearly defined and included in the provider's mission statement?
The provider is learner/customer-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>learners are at the centre of provision</i> • <i>provision and methods are adapted to the adult target group and their specific needs</i> • <i>validation of non-formal and informal learning is available</i> • <i>a lifelong learning perspective is encouraged</i> 	<p>Are the provision and methodology relevant to the target group and do they meet their needs?</p> <p>Does the provider encourage learners to participate in lifelong learning activities?</p>

<p>There is transparency of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information • offers and methods • learners' rights/protection for learners • financial information and governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>clear aims</i> • <i>transparent curriculum</i> • <i>process of learning</i> • <i>learning activities, learning outcomes</i> 	<p>Have the aims of the provision, the curriculum and the process of the learning been clearly explained and communicated?</p> <p>Are the curriculum, process of learning and learning activities clearly related to the aims?</p> <p>Is information on the outcomes of evaluation of provision made available publicly?</p>
<p>Staff are competent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>competent teachers/facilitators</i> 	<p>Are there specific requirements for staff describing the relevant competences and skills to teach adults?</p> <p>Does staff have the necessary/relevant competences to teach adults?</p> <p>Does staff have the required skills to teach adults?</p> <p>Does staff have the required attitudes/abilities to teach adults?</p> <p>Are the persons developing the programmes/courses competent?</p> <p>What are the teachers' content-related competences on the one hand (e.g. sufficient knowledge of a foreign language, if that is what s/he teaches) and the methodological competences (actually being able to use adult-oriented methods) on the other hand?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>competent guidance practitioners</i> 	<p>Do guidance practitioners have appropriate knowledge, attitude and competence?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>competent management</i> 	<p>Does the managerial staff have the right competence sets and expertise (i.e. leadership skills, financial competences)?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>adult learning methods, didactics</i> 	<p>Is provision tailor-made, relevant and learner-centred?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>continuing competence development for staff</i> 	<p>Are formal, non-formal, or informal learning facilities and/or support for attending training available?</p> <p>Is the provider stimulating institutional learning?</p>
The provider has a human resources policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>selection procedures policies, payment and working conditions</i> 	<p>Is a relevant policy in place for the selection procedure and the payment and working conditions of staff?</p> <p>Does the human resources policy include rules on diversity management and equity issues?</p> <p>Does the human resources policy include procedures for competent management?</p>
Supports are available to learner and facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>administrative procedures</i> 	<p>Are administrative procedures well-described?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>communication</i> 	<p>Is the source of information on provision and administrative issues clear to both learners and staff?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>infrastructure</i> 	<p>Is the infrastructure in place to support the learning process?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>practical support</i> 	<p>Are there additional practical support structures if needed?</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>guidance (information on different possibilities and career management skills)</i> 	<p>Is there a guidance service in place to support the learners in their learning process?</p>

Infrastructure and resources are relevant to the different courses and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>learning resources</i> • <i>staff</i> • <i>financial resource</i> • <i>material resources/facilities (ICT, classrooms, library, canteen, on-the-job environments etc.)</i> 	<p>Is the infrastructure in place to ensure adult learning is accessible?</p> <p>Are the learning resources in line with the aims of provision?</p> <p>Is the provision well-supported by relevant/necessary resources?</p>
Learning is documented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>fair and open assessment</i> • <i>learning outcomes</i> • <i>learning process</i> 	<p>Are the needed assessment procedures in place?</p> <p>Is the relevant documentation in place?</p>
A quality management system exists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>quality procedures/guidelines</i> 	<p>Are there procedures in place to assess the quality of the provision?</p> <p>Is there a clear link between needs, curriculum, resources, methods and learning outcomes?</p> <p>Are the programmes/courses based on needs assessment/needs analysis?</p> <p>Do the developed programmes fit within the broader offer of programmes/courses?</p>

<p>Provision is relevant and beneficial for stakeholders, especially the adult learners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>equity</i> • <i>employability and labour market orientation</i> • <i>active citizenship</i> • <i>basic skills</i> • <i>etc.</i> 	<p>Is provision relevant for the adult target group? Is provision meeting the intended objective? Is provision accessible for vulnerable groups? Does provision make a positive impact on social inclusion? Does provision make a positive impact on participants' working life? Does provision address the needs of the existing workforce, those entering the workforce and those excluded from the workforce? What has been the impact of the learning trajectory on the participants' working life? Is labour market information used to develop adult learning programmes? Does the provider co-operate and have consultations with the relevant stakeholders in the governmental, non-governmental and private sectors?</p>
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Annex 1.2 Draft Checklist for Staff Quality Policy

	YES		NO	
	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal
1. Legal regulations regarding the qualifications of adult learning staff (Please check (√) whether the regulations / processes below exist in your country)				
a. Specific initial qualification requirements to enter the profession				
b. Recruitment and selection policies				
c. Accreditation of prior learning				
d. A system of monitoring, internal evaluation and assessment				
e. Periodic external evaluation				
f. Induction and mentoring programmes for new teachers/educators				
g. Registration, certification, accreditation of the non-vocational adult learning provider				
2. Regulatory frameworks for the professional development of staff (Please check (√) whether the following areas are defined in your country)				
a. Areas or clusters of activities within non-vocational adult learning are identified and defined (see grid below)				
b. Competence profiles regarding the different tasks to be performed in the different areas and work domains are identified and defined:				
i. teaching				
ii. management				
iii. information and guidance				
iv. programme planning				
v. supporting positions (technical, administrative and organisational)				
vi. media use				
3. Career paths / pathways leading to the profession (Please check (√) whether the following mechanism and processes exist / are in place)				
a. A systematic description of the education system's qualifications leading to the adult learning profession, where all learning achievements are measured and related to each other				
b. Qualifications are compatible with national/ European qualification frameworks				
c. The highest priority in terms of investment is given to in-service training				
d. In-service training is recognised and validated within national qualification frameworks				

e. Short courses, induction programmes and work learning arrangements support the professionalisation of staff				
f. Practices and the provision of initial and continuing training of adult learning staff are transparent				
g. Content and processes for initial and continuing training				
h. Initial training for adult learning staff by adult education organisations (such as employers in adult learning, adult learning institutions, state agencies etc)				
i. Mechanisms to identify training needs				
j. Continuing professional development for the different professional profiles based on needs and evaluations of previous trainings				
k. Mechanisms for validation of learning outcomes acquired in Grundtvig and other mobility programmes				
4. Employment situation of adult learning staff (Please check (✓) whether the following mechanism and processes exist / are in place)				
a. Job seekers are well informed about employment possibilities				
b. Given the employment status of a high percentage of practitioners in the field of non-vocational adult learning, flexicurity (flexibility and security) is stimulated				
c. Employment and social security for staff are foreseen				
d. Employers are well informed about the cohort of potential employees				
e. Professional associations in the field are developed				
f. The sector comes together in national/regional platforms				
g. Examples of good practices are collected and information on these is easily accessible and comparable				
h. Young people are informed about the long-term possibilities of entering and staying in this profession				
i. Incentives and support for co-operative activities are available				
j. Salary, working hours, social security and pension schemes are regulated				
k. Formal qualifications required for adult learning professionals are adopted				
5. Data collection for policy development (Please check (✓) whether the following mechanism and processes exist / are in place)				
a. Infrastructure to collect data on the range of staff profiles				
b. Infrastructure to collect data for different sectors				
c. Mapping or profiling of future needs regarding staff and staff continuous professional development				
d. Mapping or profiling of future needs regarding target adult groups				
6. Systematic and regular promotion of the nature and benefits of adult learning professions				

(Please check (√) whether the following take place)				
a. Advertising and publicity campaigns promote adult learning and related professions				
b. Career weeks, lifelong learning festivals promote adult learning and related professions				
c. The profession gains visibility and is therefore considered a career option by students				
d. Young people are informed about the longer term possibilities to enter and to stay in the profession				
e. Data on adult learning staff are regularly recorded, stored and organised and are accessible				
f. There are elaborate and sophisticated systems of data gathering, registration and analysis at national level				
7. Quality assurance and quality management (Please check (√) whether the following mechanism and processes exist / are in place)				
e. External evaluation, monitoring of staff (self-evaluation) and peer reviews				
f. Internal evaluation				
g. External measures such as accreditation, external evaluation by either authorities, professional associations or bodies are emphasised				

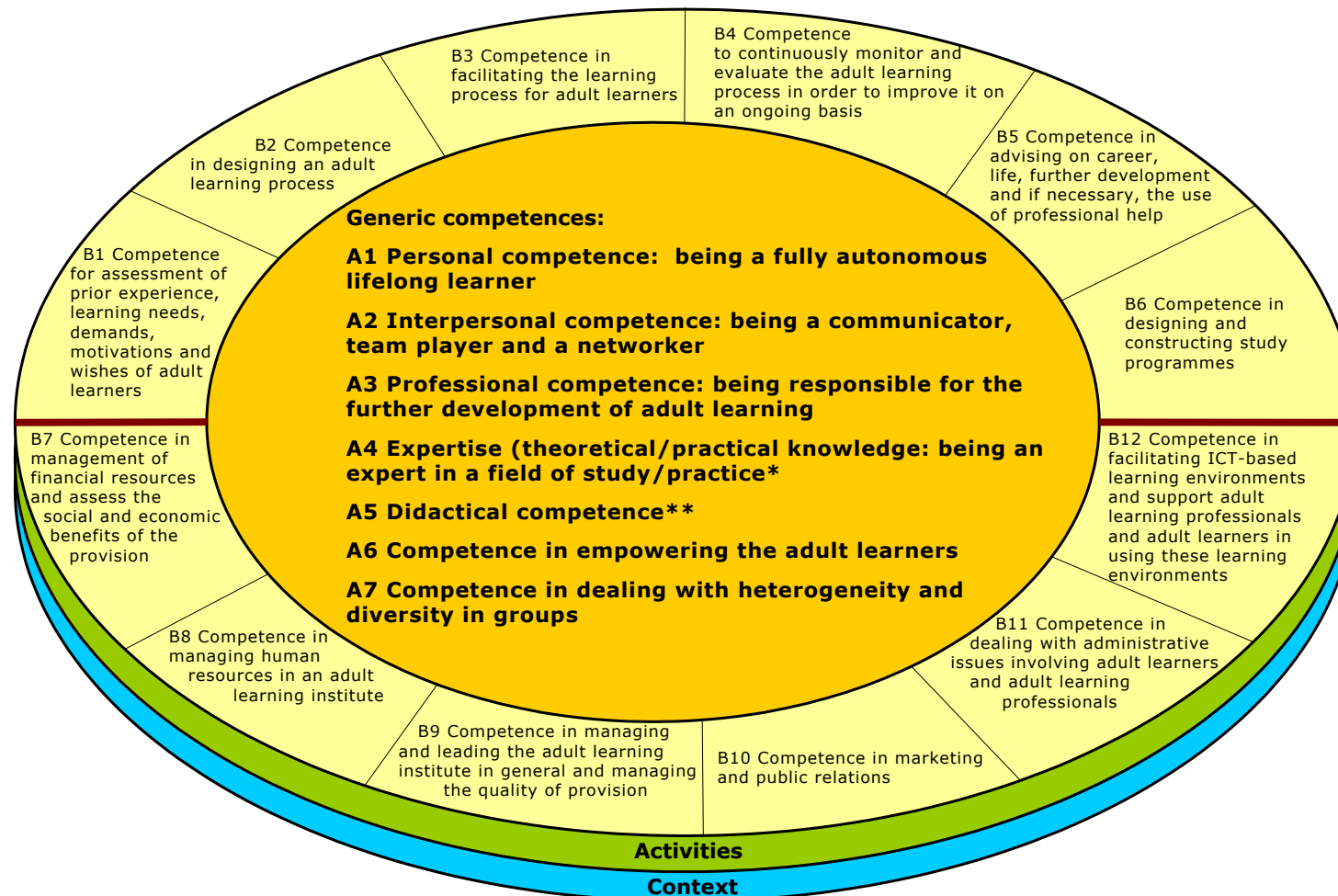
Annex 1.3 Draft Staff Profiling Grid

The profiling grid aims to show how different competences have different degrees of importance in different sectors. The grid can serve as a tool which national authorities can adapt to the very diverse national situations, where they differ from the one suggested here. The fourth column is partially completed as an example – the codes refer to the Key Competence Profile for adult learning professionals on the following page

Sectors		Liberal education	General civic and political education	Formal primary and lower secondary education	Basic skills training, incl at workplace	Academic upper secondary for adults (2 nd chance)	Immigrant Integration 1: language + social orientation	Immigrant Integration 2: Initial literacy combined with III	Vocational training for adults	Other
Teachers										
Reference to “Key competences for adult learning professionals”	Most important gaps in generic competences				A2, A4, A5, A6					
	Most important gaps in specific competences				B1, B2, B6					
	Other competences needed				Workplace relevance					
	Provision of training									
	Existence of accreditation systems									
	Other comments				A4 needs to be analysed & defined					
Administrators										
Guidance staff										

Key Competence Profile for adult learning professionals

This proposal for a key competence profile is included in a study conducted in 2010 for the European Commission by Research voor Beleid (2010): *Key Competences for adult learning professionals. Contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning Professionals. Final report.*



Annex 1.4 Proposals for indicators to monitor adult learning quality

No	Quality Criteria	Key Questions	Indicator	Descriptor / Trend
1	Quality Assurance Systems	Does an accreditation system exist for providers of adult learning?	Number of nationally recognised accredited providers	Number of accredited providers increasing over the last 5 years
		Is there a range of appropriate quality assurance systems in place for adult learning providers? Does a legal framework exist to ensure quality assurance of adult learning provision?	Number of providers using quality assurance systems	National benchmarks are established for the implementation of quality assurance systems, including accreditation
2	Accessibility of adult learning programmes	Is the infrastructure in place to ensure adult learning is accessible? Is provision of adult learning opportunities well distributed over the country / region?	Rate of accredited providers to population Participation rates per region	Steady increase in participation rate over last 5 years

		Are the duration and the content of the programmes appropriate?		Wide range and types of programmes available Increasing range and type of programmes responsive to changing needs
		Are adult learning opportunities also delivered through distance learning or other flexible forms?		Wide range of diverse programmes available including flexible delivery
		Is provision accessible to vulnerable groups?	Ratio of vulnerable groups participating in adult learning	Rate of participation by vulnerable groups shows increasing trend
3	Quality of Staff	Is there an appropriate licence to practise relating to adult learning in operation?	Number of licensed practitioners from recognised programmes	Numbers of licensed practitioners are increasing
		Is there a requirement to undertake continuing professional development? Are the opportunities for continuing professional development transparent?	Number of licensed practitioners participating in continuing professional development programmes	Increasing range of continuing professional development programmes exists

4	Availability of information and guidance	<p>Does a nationally co-ordinated system of information and guidance for adult learning exist</p> <p>Are schemes in place to promote better access to adult learning?</p>	<p>Flexible access to information and guidance including the number of access points in the region</p> <p>Ratio of access points per head of population</p>	<p>Growing co-ordination of guidance services</p> <p>Increasing access to independent information and guidance</p> <p>Increasing number of users of access points</p>
		<p>Is there an appropriate policy for increasing awareness of adult learning?</p> <p>Can adults avail of a guidance service to support their persistence in and progression from, adult learning programmes and their career management skills?</p>	<p>Number of events and activities on national level to promote adult learning annually</p> <p>Proportion of adults with access to an on-going guidance service</p> <p>Retention rates on adult learning programmes</p>	<p>Innovative promotional campaigns increasingly available and innovative</p> <p>Growing availability of a guidance service for adults</p>
5	Leadership and management of adult learning programmes	<p>Is there clear leadership with good use of Management Information Systems (MIS) to monitor performance and review the quality?</p>	<p>Completion rate</p> <p>Achievement rate</p> <p>Progression rate</p> <p>High level of learner</p>	<p>Completion and achievement rates are increasing</p> <p>Participants' satisfaction levels are consistently positive</p>

			satisfaction rates	
		Is there good governance?	Cost effectiveness of the programme (or cost per learner) / Return on investment	Programmes showing increasing cost effectiveness; increasing trends in return/profit Sound financial risk management ensured
		Are budget and financial targets met?	The extent to which budgets and financial targets are met	Financial targets increasingly met

6	Outcomes	Has the adult learning provision made a positive impact on participants' working life?	<p>Percentage of participants in sustained employment 6 months after completing programme</p> <p>Percentage of stakeholders indicating that skills achieved by learners meet skills demand</p> <p>Percentage of participants reporting wider benefits from adult learning, including social, citizenship and health effects</p>	Decreasing skills shortages
		Has the adult learning provision made a positive impact on participants' social inclusion?	<p>Percentage of participants with improved employment situation</p> <p>Percentage of participants gaining a qualification on completion</p>	<p>Increasing levels of participants' satisfaction;</p> <p>Increasing levels of achievement</p>
		Has the adult learning provision made a positive impact on participants' progression to further learning?	Participants progressing to further training on completion	Levels of positive progression are increasing

8	Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market	Is there up-to-date information on economic and labour market indicators? Are there sector-specific labour market indicators?		Labour market information published at regular intervals
		Do employer representative bodies exist?	The percentage of major sectors represented by employer representative bodies with a clearly defined role	Upward trend in percentage of major sectors represented by employer representative bodies with a clearly defined role
	Efforts to ensure relevance of adult learning provision to labour market needs	Are there formal links between employer representative bodies and providers of adult learning to ensure relevance of the provision to the needs of the economy?		Increasing links established between employer representative bodies and adult learning providers over the last five years
		Have priority skills areas been identified?		
7	Contribution to economic growth and social inclusion	Does the adult learning provision address the needs of the existing workforce, those entering the workforce and those excluded from the workforce? Does the adult learning provision support the needs of the self-employed	Unemployment rate Volunteering rate Growth rate of SME sector	Decline in unemployment rate Increasing rate of volunteering Productivity rate increasing Increase in self-employed Increasing rate of participation of

		<p>and entrepreneurs?</p> <p>Are the social partners participating in local, regional and national bodies addressing issue of economic growth and social inclusion?</p> <p>Are the social partners involved in institutions / bodies providing adult learning at local, regional and national levels?</p>	<p>Economically inactive rate</p> <p>Percentage of local, regional and national bodies in which the social partners are involved</p> <p>Percentage of institutions / bodies providing adult learning at local, regional and national levels in which the social partners are involved</p>	<p>social partners</p> <p>Increasing rate of participation of social partners</p>
9	Validation of non-formal and informal learning	Is there an appropriate system in place to provide adults with the opportunity of validating their non-formal and informal learning?	Number of adults obtaining validation of non-formal and informal learning	<p>Increasing number of accredited facilitators of validation over the last 5 years</p> <p>Increasing number of qualifications achieved through learning / validation of non-formal and informal learning</p>

		Is there a guidance service to support adults seeking validation of non-formal and informal learning?	Number of guidance access points / practitioners per head of population	
10	Qualifications System	Is there a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for lifelong learning based on learning outcomes?	Number of diplomas / certificates issued against NQF standards	Increased number of qualifications achieved learning / validation of non-formal and informal learning
		Does the NQF include qualifications issued following validation, qualifications issued following second-chance programmes, qualifications issued outside the formal systems?		

ANNEX 2: ABBREVIATIONS

ACL: Adult Community Learning

CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CPD: Continuing professional development

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

CVET: Continuing vocational education and training

CVT: Continuing vocational training

EAEA European Association for the Education of Adults

EBSN: European Basic Skills Network

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

EFQM: formerly known as the European Foundation for Quality Management

ELGPN: European Lifelong Learning Guidance Policy Network

ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAVET: European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

EQM: European Quality Mark

ESG: European Standards and Guidelines (for quality assurance in higher education)

ET2020: 'Education and Training 2020'

ETUCE: European Trade Union Committee for Education

EU: European Union

EU2020: 'Europe 2020'

Eurostat: Statistical Office of the European Communities

Eurydice: European Network on education systems and policies in Europe

HE: Higher education

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

IPD: Initial professional development

ISO: International Organization for Standardization

IVET: Initial vocational education and training

IVT: Initial vocational training

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

NVAL: Non-vocational adult learning, that is, adult learning not intended to lead directly to employment

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OMC: Open Method of Co-ordination

PLA: Peer Learning Activity

QALLL: Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning Network

TWG: Thematic Working Group

UIL: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

VET: vocational education and training

ANNEX 3: THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

1. Mandate of Thematic Working Groups in the Framework of ET2020

The establishment of the *ET2020* work programme gave a mandate for the Commission to establish, together with Member States, new Thematic Working Groups to work on priority areas. It emphasises that while the cooperation is about exchanging good practise and peer learning, work should be based on clear work plans, time schedules and produce "clear and visible outputs" that can be easily disseminated and that provide Member States with practical and useful tools to guide (?) their policy work.

The term Thematic Working Group is used to mean the grouping of interested countries around a specific theme, on which they have ex-pressed a desire to learn from other interested countries, and the overall European development, and to share their policies and concrete experiences. These themes correspond to their national policy priorities and key priority areas of the ET2020 work programme. Key stakeholders including the social partners, relevant European institutions and key national stakeholders will form the membership of the TWGs. The groups will use various working methods, such as Peer Learning Activities, seminars, study visits or other relevant activities.

2. Overall Objectives of the Thematic Working Group

The Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning is tasked with developing a quality framework which will inform and guide both Member States and individual providers on the provision of high quality adult learning. It will also enable learners to make informed choices relating to quality provision. The group will produce tools that are practical and useful for participating countries and stakeholders.

The Thematic Working Group's understanding of quality in adult learning is based on the Cedefop definitions of quality (taken from ISO 8402 and ISO 2000, respectively) as 'all characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs' or 'the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements. The Thematic Group also bases its understanding of quality assurance in education and training on the Cedefop definition, namely, 'Activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that all education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders'.

The Thematic Working Group aims to:

- contribute to and facilitate the improvement of the quality of adult learning. This will be done through:
 - sharing practice and experience from the MS and partner countries;
 - establishing general principles that will enable each country to assess their situation in relation to the quality of adult education;
 - creating a road map which will assist countries to establish short, medium-term and long-term targets to make progress towards high quality in adult learning provision;
- share ideas and practice on how to achieve an improvement in the quality of adult learning at system, providers and practitioner levels;

- establish general principles that will enable each country to assess their situation in relation to the quality of adult learning;
- deepen and complement the work on the three priorities: indicators, accreditation / governance and staff quality through peer learning, particularly for improving national and EU policies in these areas;
- work with the National Co-ordinators for adult learning in recognition of their role in identifying high quality adult education;
- explore synergies and strengthen the policy links/interface between EU policy developments in quality in VET and higher education, adult learning, employment and social inclusion;
- showcase good practice;
- produce policy advice to assist national policy-makers, developers and stakeholders in their national and EU-level policy development, and disseminate the outcomes of the Thematic Working Group through EU-level and Member States-level tools;
- ensure that the research study and the TWG do not duplicate work;
- create connections between the subgroups working on the priority areas and other sectors of education and training and the work of the Thematic Working Group on Financing Adult Learning;
- develop an exploitation strategy for the work of the TWG

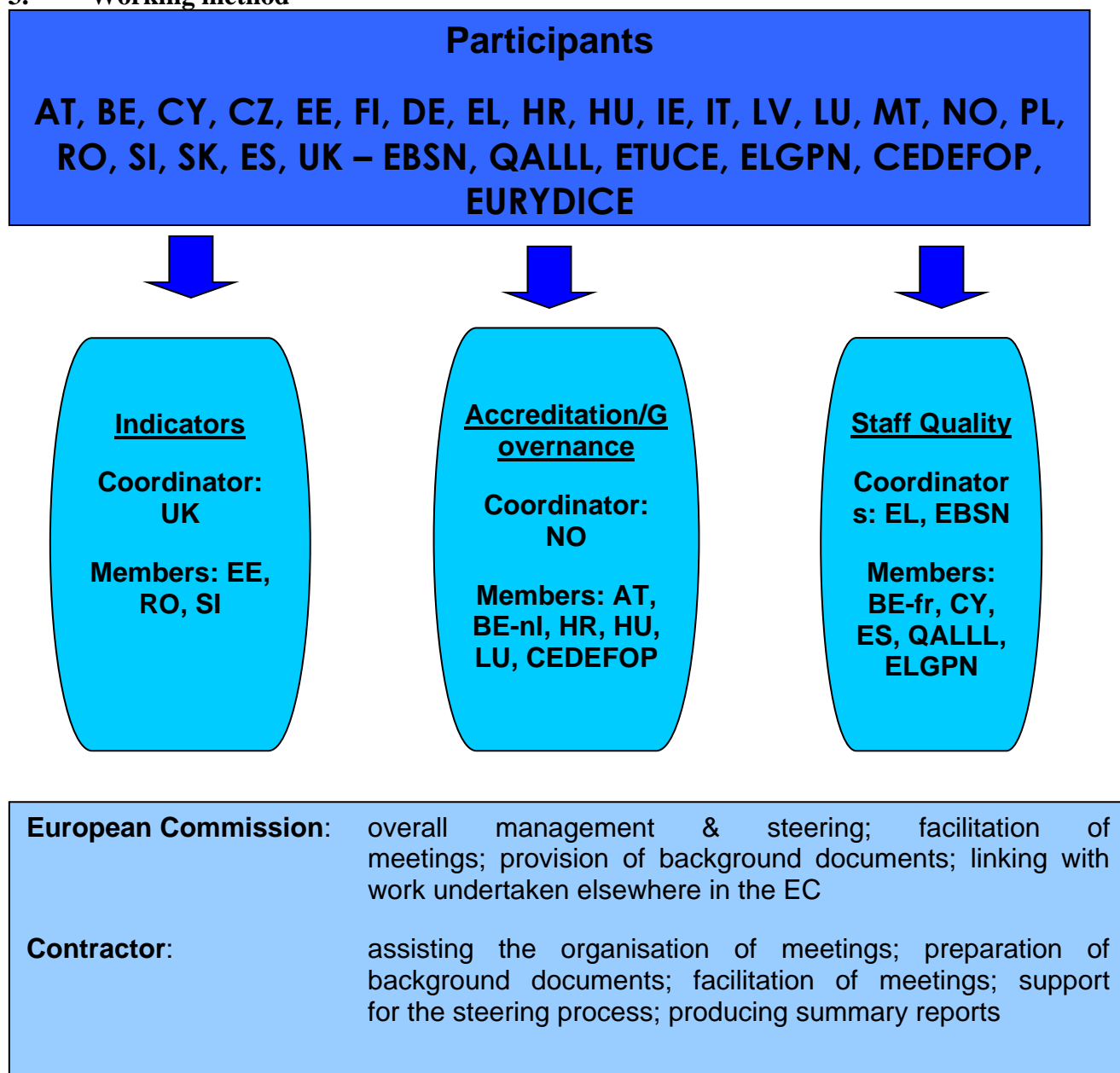
Concretely, the TWG focused on three key areas, namely:

- The accreditation of education and training providers
- Staff quality
- Indicators.

The TWG aims to produce the following overall outputs based on the work of the three sub-groups: the production of:

- A policy framework for quality assurance
- A policy handbook.

3. Working method



Meeting and PLAs

The meetings of the TWG comprised: 10 plenary meetings; sub-group discussions within the plenary meetings and online outside of plenary meetings to produce the elements of the tool-kit for policy-makers and other stakeholders; a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on each of the following topics: accreditation of providers (Austria, February 2013); the professionalisation of adult learning staff (Romania, April 2013); and the contribution of guidance, validation and the use of indicators to the quality of adult learning (Malta, May 2013).

ANNEX 4: CONTRIBUTION FROM THE QALLL THEMATIC NETWORK

The QALLL-Network¹ identified a wide range of Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci projects which represent good practice in the areas addressed by the ‘toolbox’ developed by the TWG on quality in adult learning, namely accreditation of providers of adult learning; staff quality and indicators. They are set out below as possible sources of inspiration, guidance and models for relevant stakeholders.

Accreditation of education and training providers

Seven projects² with a focus on accreditation were identified as good practice by the QALLL-Network: The projects **DASVENT**, **EQUASS**, **QVETIS**, **RECALL** and **TQP-EU** all work with accreditation systems for institutions, VET providers and educational service providers. The objectives for the accreditation include different approaches on how to inform the public about institutions providing quality education (DASVENT, EQUASS), including: stage models (TQP-EU), working methods (QVETIS) and a quality assurance mark (RECALL). Accreditation and validation of informal and non-formal learning are covered by the remaining two projects **ACT-NET** and **EXPERO2EU**, which developed a European standard for the assessment of the quality of learning outcomes.

Table 1. QALLL projects / products related to the accreditation of education and training providers

Project Name	Project Website	ADAM Link	Short Description
DASVENT – Development of an Accreditation System for Veterinary Nurse Trainers in Europe	www.acovene.com	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2611	The minimum standards of accreditation of veterinary nursing programmes
EQUASS – European Quality in Practice	www.epr.eu/index.php/equass/projects/166	www.adam-europe.eu/prj/6213/project_6213_en.pdf	Comprehensive sector-specific Quality Management System
QVETIS – Training in Quality: VET and Enterprises	www.traininginquality.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4094&page=1	Protocol for the certification of Continuing Training Providers
RECALL – Recognition of Quality in Lifelong Learning	www.eaea.org/index.php?k=2140&projekti_id=3389	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=6660	A quality assurance system for lifelong learning providers
TQP-EU – Transnational Quality Project –Quality Guidelines for Providers of Vocational Education and Training	www.leonardo-tqp.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2711	Stage models
ACT-NET – Active Citizen Training Network	www.act-eu.org	http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/grundtvig/documents/Grundtvig_en_2008.pdf	Accreditation and validation of informal and non-formal learning
EXPERO2EU – Expero in European Union: Focus on Mechatronics	www.expero2.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4408	A European standard for the assessment of the learning outcome quality.

¹ Cf. <http://www.qalll.eu>.

² ACT-NET, DASVENT, EQUASS, EXPERO2EU, QVETIS, RECALL, TQP-EU

Staff quality

Most of the QALLL projects in this field aimed at raising the skills and competences of the educational staff. These projects worked on aspects of staff profiles, ranging from general skills and competences to specific requirements for the staff in selected educational activities. Self-evaluation, self-assessment and reflective practices were all seen as key requirements for educational staff. These processes can be carried out in several ways and with different target groups, as the projects below indicate.

Table 2. QALLL projects / products related to staff quality

Project Name	Project Website	ADAM Link	Short Description
AVE-EXEMPLO – Assessment, Visibility and Exploitation of Non-/Informally Acquired Competencies of EXperienced EMPLOYees in Enterprises	www.f-bb.de/projekte/internationalisierung-der-berufsbildung/internationalisierung-der-berufsbildung/proinfo/ave-exemplo.html	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4888	The skills and competences of the trainers and companies' staff
CM Pro Work – Competence Management in the Production Sector	www.cmprowork.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=1796	The skills and competences of the trainers and companies' staff
QUALIVET – Quality Development and Quality Assurance with Labour Market Reference	www.qualivet.info	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2039	Standards for and a profile of the skills and competences in self-evaluation and self-assessment
REVIMP – From Review to Improvement in European Vocational Education and Training	n/a	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2609&page=1	The standards determining the quality demands, including the profile of the teaching staff
EQUAL – Evaluation and Quality Assurance in Adult Education	www.qualityinlearning.net	http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/Bots/docbots/TCP/Compendia/Compendia2005.htm	The general profile of the trainers, the quality criteria and the certification of these
Flexi-Path – Flexible Professionalisation Pathways for Adult Educators between the 6th and the 7th Level of QF	www.flexi-path.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=3818	Clear links to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
QVETIS – Training in Quality: VET and Enterprises	www.traininginquality.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4094&page=1	Training designs for both trainer staff and quality managers
Peer Review Extended II	www.peer-review-education.net	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2958	The specific skills and competences in relation to peer reviews
Peer Review in Initial VET	www.peer-review-education.net	www.leonardodavinci-projekte.org/adam/project/view.htm?prj=1656	The specific skills and competences in relation to peer reviews
Guiding from School to Job – Professionalism in the Work with Young People at Risk of Social Exclusion / Guiding from School to Job	www.bildungsmarkt.de/en/index.php?m=4&mi=104&mid=159	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2052	Quality standards for guidance training to the “informal guidance workers”.
SEALLL – Self-Evaluation in Adult Life-Long Learning	n/a	n/a	Standards for and a profile of the skills and competences in self-evaluation and self-assessment
Reflect OR – Reflective Practices for Professional	http://reflect.tagliacarne.it	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm	Increasing the capabilities of teachers and trainers in VET

Guidance Practitioners		htm?prj=4488	implementing “reflective practices” in their activities
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Indicators

A wide range of the selected QALLL projects³ work with indicators and quality criteria defining and indicating quality. The project listed below work with different numbers of quality criteria and indicators, often supplemented by manuals and systems, and can be seen as a comprehensive toolbox providing a potential source of inspiration. The structure, types and number of quality criteria and indicators represent a key decision in quality assurance and development. The proposed / used broad range of indicators, quality criteria, systems and manuals provides a good starting point, both for establishing new quality systems and for challenging and developing existing models.

Table 3. QALLL projects / products related to indicators

Project Name	Project Website	ADAM Link	Short Description
ACT-NET – Active Citizen Training Network	www.act-eu.org	http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/grundtvig/documents/Grundtvig_en_2008.pdf	A general evaluation approach
EXPERO2EU – Expero in European Union: Focus on Mechatronics	www.expero2.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4408	Indicators and quality criteria for evaluation of the quality of VET learning outcomes
Reflect OR – Reflective Practices for Professional Guidance Practitioners	http://reflect.tagliacarne.it	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4488	Indicators and quality criteria for reflection
QVETIS – Training in Quality: VET and Enterprises	www.traininginquality.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4094&page=1	10 different indicators with definitions in line with the EQAVET indicators
REVIMP – From Review to Improvement in European Vocational Education and Training	n/a	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2609&page=1	Presents the theoretical framework for investigating which factors enable or constrain a successful review phase in quality assurance activities
Development of a Validation Framework for Mentoring: Evaluating the Achievements of Disabled and Disadvantaged People	n/a	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=6664	Mentors
EGUIDE – Quality Assurance Framework for Guidance in Initial Training	n/a	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=3015&page=1	Focus on helping disadvantaged job seekers
QA in YCC – Quality Assurance in Youth Career Consultancy	http://vqac.org	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4165	Focus on youth career consultancy
EMPOWER – European Melting Pot Wide Range Quality System	n/a	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=6299	Indicators and monitoring tools have been determined per cohort, per student and per teaching unit
EQUASS – European	www.epr.eu/index.php/	www.adam-europe.eu/	Manual and system for

³ Including ACT-NET, Development of a Validation Framework for Mentoring, EGUIDE, EMPOWER, EQUASS in Practice, EFA, EXPERO2EU, GEMS, AQOR, Peer Review Extended II, Peer Review in Initial VET, QUALC, QA in YCC, QUALIVET, QVETIS, QWVET, RECALL, EQM, Reflect OR, REVIMP.

Quality in Practice	equass/projects/166	prj/6213/project_6213_en.pdf	certification of VET providers
QUALIVET – Quality Development and Quality Assurance with Labour Market Reference	www.qualivet.info	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2039	Quality criteria and indicators (quality areas) for assessing VET provision at the provider level
RECALL – Recognition of Quality in Lifelong Learning	www.eaea.org/index.php?k=2140&projekti_id=3389	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=6660	Introduced the European Quality Mark and developed a quality assurance system for lifelong learning providers
TQP-EU – Transnational Quality Project –Quality Guidelines for Providers of Vocational Education and Training	www.leonardo-tqp.eu	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2711	Quality guidelines
Peer Review in Initial VET	www.peer-review-education.net	www.leonardodavinci-projekte.org/adam/project/view.htm?prj=1656	Quality criteria and indicators (quality areas) for assessing VET provision at the provider level and criteria for peer reviews
Peer Review Extended II	www.peer-review-education.net	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=2958	Quality criteria and indicators (quality areas) for assessing VET provision at the provider level and criteria for peer reviews
GEMS – Guidance for Educators, Mentors and Students	www.leogems.org	www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4063	Focus on work-based learning in hospitality and tourism
QWVET – Quality Workplace Training for Unemployed Young People	n/a	n/a	A manual which provides the basis for the implementation of quality procedures in work-based vocational education and training (VET) programmes.

ANNEX 5: 2013 STUDY IN QUALITY: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEM-LEVEL MEASURES TO ASSURE QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING⁴

Challenges exist in countries in relation to actual quality development and quality assurance measures (where they exist). Reviewing developments in the different countries, the following challenges and responses can be identified concerning system level quality assurance instruments.

The final report and its detailed annexes are available in the website of the Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/education/adult/studies_en.htm), below a summary table http://ec.europa.eu/education/adult/studies_en.htm with country specific findings and suggestions.

Summary table

Key challenge	Response to the challenge	Relevant quality assurance system	Countries to which this challenge applies
1) Lack of overarching QA system / regulation for assuring quality in the whole adult learning sector (national level)	Develop an overarching system with minimum requirements	Meta-frameworks: AT (Ö-Cert) Overarching frameworks: CH: EduQua; IE FETAC framework	Major: NL, BG, CZ, CY, HR, PL, BE (Flanders), BE (Walloon), LU, MT, TK Minor: DK, EE, FI, NO, SE, ES, IS, DE, HU, LT, LV, RO, FR, IE, IT, PT
2) Lack of system / framework / regulation for assuring quality in the non-formal part of adult learning	Develop a quality assurance system for non-formal adult learning, with setting minimum quality requirements	Systems organised by public bodies: CH: EduQua; FR: Greta-plus; LU: Quality label Systems organised by private bodies: DE: Hamburg model; NL: quality seal folk universities; NL: NRTO code of conduct	Major: DK, EE, NL, NO, ES, IS, BG, CZ, CY, BE (Walloon), FR, IT, MT Minor: FI, SE, SI, UK, DE, HR, LT, LV RO, IE, LU, PT, TK
	Stimulating quality developments without setting minimum quality requirements	Quality prizes: DE Stiftungwarenpreis, SE, FI	
	Providing additional support structures	Quality guidelines/manual: SE (BRUK); Staff development programme: NO, MT; SI: Offering Quality Education to Adults; CZ: Concept project*	

⁴ From Panteia (2013) Developing the adult learning sector. Quality in adult learning. (Lot 1). Final Report.

3) Lack of attention to adult learning specific elements in quality systems / regulation for formal education	Increase attention to adult learning elements in formal education	VET: UK (Wales): ESTYN inspectorate; IE: FETAC framework*; FR: Greta-plus General education: MT: QA Structures in basic skills	Major: NL, BG, CZ, CY, HR, HU, PL, RO, LU Minor: AT, DK, NO, SE, ES, IS, DE, LT, LV, BE (Flanders), BE (Walloon), EL, FR, IE, IT, MT, TK
4) Lack of (specific) legal requirements for adult learning staff/ Lacking initial training and continuing professional development	Set staff requirements at national level	MT: QA Structures in basic skills AT: Wba; CH: Train the Trainer (AdA)	Requirements (formal): Major: CY Minor: CH, EE, NL, NO, SE, IS, BG, CZ, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, IE, MT, TK
			Requirements (non-formal): Major: NL, ES, CY, DE, IE, MT, TK Minor: AT, CH, DK, EE, FI, NO, SE, UK, IS, BG, CZ, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, BE (Flanders), BE (Walloon), EL, PT
			Initial training (formal): Major: TK Minor: AT, DK, NL, NO, SI, ES, IS, BG, CZ, CY, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, EL, FR, IE, MT
			Initial training (non-formal): Major: AT, NL, CY, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, EL, IE, MT, TK Minor: CH, DK, EE, FI, NO, SE, SI, UK, ES, IS, BG, CZ, DE, BE (Flanders), PT
5) Lack of system / regulation for assuring quality of APL provision and guidance	Set minimum quality requirements for APL providers	NL: Quality Code APL; PT: quality charter New Opportunity Centres (closed in 01-2013)	Major: DK, EE, UK, ES, BG, CY, PL, BE (Walloon), EL, LU, MT, TK Minor: AT, CH, FI, SE, SI, IS, DE, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, IE
	Set minimum quality requirements for guidance providers	DK: quality in guidance	Major: EE, UK, ES, DE, PL, BE (Walloon), EL, MT Minor: AT, CH, FI, NL, NO, SE, SL, IS, BG, CY, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, FR, IE, LU, PT, TK
6) Lack of monitoring data in the AL sector (provision of AL and effects)	Establish sector-level indicators for monitoring	EL: Quality ▪ Always ▪ Everywhere	Major: DK, EE, NL, NO, IS, BG, CY, DE, HR, HU, LT, LV, RO, EL, IE, MT, PT, TK Minor: AT, FI, ES, SE, SI, UK, CZ, PL, BE (Flanders), BE (Walloon), FR, IT, LU

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