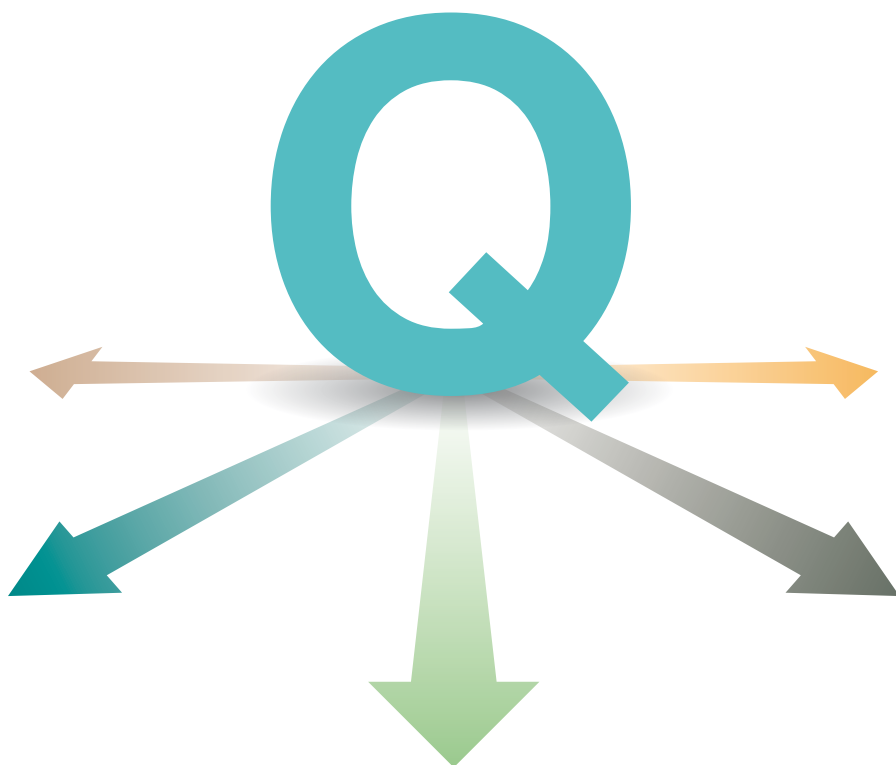




Assuring quality in vocational education and training

The role of accrediting VET providers





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Luxembourg:
Publications Office of the European Union, 2011

ISBN 978-92-896-0832-9
doi:10.2801/91293

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Designed by Fotone - Greece
Printed in the European Union

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We provide information on and analyses of vocational education and training systems, policies, research and practice.

Cedefop was established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75.

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Foreword

This study is part of Cedefop's research activities that focus on analysis of two mechanisms set up to assure quality in VET: outcome standards and targets, and accreditation. Authorities use targets to measure how effectively ever reduced resources are used and whether VET systems and providers deliver the services agreed to. Outcome or output standards for individual learners usually form part of national qualifications frameworks or of region-specific standards and are set by national/regional authorities, often in cooperation with the social partners. Rewards or penalties are natural consequences for VET providers for meeting or not meeting targets. They can lose their accreditation which can prevent them from receiving funding or from delivering training recognised at national or regional levels. On the other hand, constant attainment of targets gives access to public recognition and in some countries to additional funding as well.

From the above, it becomes clear that output standards/targets and accreditation are closely connected. They both comprise external evaluation according to clearly defined rules but standards precede accreditation since VET providers are evaluated against predefined standards and criteria before getting accredited. This is why Cedefop, after having dealt with standards from a comparative perspective (Cedefop, 2008a), now focuses on accreditation.

The present study deals with accreditation of VET providers operating within national or sectoral VET systems and how accreditation is related to quality assurance. It focuses on both accreditation of VET providers and programmes, and complements the exploratory study that Cedefop published in 2009 (Cedefop, 2009a).

Accreditation is formal recognition that a body is competent to carry out specific tasks. Accreditation of an education and training provider is the process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to the provider showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards (Cedefop, 2008c). This recognition may be attributed by State authorities or – in case of sectoral accreditation – by a sectoral professional body, often an umbrella organisation of the VET providers operating in the specific sector and branch. This formal recognition has clear implications for VET providers since it may regulate their access to public funding. Accreditations issued by sectors and

their umbrella organisations confer the right to deliver certificates recognised by them. Such accreditations respond to strong demand for Europe-wide standards in training and recognition of qualifications for employees' transnational mobility.

The research sample of the present study includes seven Member States (Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Romania and UK/England) and four sectoral approaches (banking and financial services, hotels and restaurants, welding and the European computer driving licence in the ICT sector). Comparative analysis revealed that despite considerable differences between countries and sectors, and also within the same country, accreditations follow similar objectives and procedural steps to such an extent that it has been possible to define a prototype for accreditation processes which is certainly part of the study's added value. Another important outcome refers to closer cooperation between VET and higher education in accreditation observed in several countries. Although it is early to draw conclusions, this is starting to become a trend in light of the European education area being put into place supported by the European qualifications framework and related national qualifications frameworks being developed by European countries in a lifelong learning perspective.

The study has also revealed that European cooperation at VET level between accreditation authorities has become more intense since we are moving towards recognition of accreditation of VET providers and programmes carried out by foreign accreditation agencies but under the same standards applied in the provider's country. VET providers will thus be able to seek accreditation from foreign accreditation authorities, which is already possible for higher education institutions. It is not yet clear whether we are going towards mergers of accreditation bodies because policy in this field diverges considerably. Some countries encourage competition between many agencies, while others are moving from a multiagency and multilayered system to a more simplified one.

However, implementation of the 'Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 setting out the requirements for accreditation and market surveillance ...' (European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union, 2008a), although focusing on marketing of products, is expected to have an impact on the institutional settings for accreditation systems in place. Whatever developments in the field will be, the reputation of the awarding body and the procedures it follows will continue to be the most important quality guarantee for providers and learners alike.

Experience gained since 1970 shows that the time is ripe for turning accreditation into a driving force for improving – and not only assuring – the quality of VET. A systematic strategy on accreditation in VET, embedded into existing European cooperation on quality assurance (EQAVET) and providing a comprehensive set of requirements to boost effective internal quality management within VET organisations, could support this switch of focus of accreditation more towards quality.

This study links to the overall work on qualifications carried out by Cedefop in recent years. It shows that the value of a qualification – for further education and training and/or for employment – depends on its credibility among individual users and in society at large. This credibility is directly influenced by the quality and reputation of providers of education and training and therefore accreditation stands out as a key instrument for ensuring requirements have been met and for systematically strengthening common trust and improving learning provision.

Christian F. Lettmayr
Acting Director

Acknowledgements

This study is a team effort, reflecting the work of Tina Bertzeletou, Cedefop's senior expert responsible for coordinating and supervising the project, and a research consortium led by INBAS GmbH (Institut für berufliche Bildung, Arbeitsmarkt- und Sozialpolitik (Institute for Vocational Training, Labour Market and Social Policy) ⁽¹⁾). An advisory board was set up consisting of Hermann Schmidt, former Director of the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB) in Germany, Bob Mansfield, international VET expert from the UK, Professor Erwin Seyfried from the Berlin School of Economics and Law.

A team of national and sectoral experts conducted the field research: Birgit Achterberg covered the case studies of Denmark and the banking and financial services sector, Emilia Barone analysed the case of the Lombardy region/Italy, Elena Cilia investigated ECDL – European computer driving licence, Dimitra Ioannou drafted the case of Romania, Petra Lippegas drew up the case of Germany, Katalin Molnar-Stadler reported on Hungary, Richard Rooke analysed the case of UK/England, Birgit Voigt reported on the welding and hotels and restaurants sectors, assisted by Birgit Rasehorn, INBAS. The team was coordinated by Erwin Seyfried who also drew up the two cases on the French accreditation system.

Cedefop would like to thank the project partners for their commitment. Special thanks are due to the numerous interview partners for their support and advice, to representatives of ministries, government agencies and sectoral associations as well as to public and private training providers who participated in the interviews and shared their knowledge and experience during site visits.

Special thanks are due to Loukas Zahilas, Cedefop, who reviewed the whole report and made valuable proposals for improvement.

Finally, thanks are due to Cedefop colleagues Christine Nychas and Alessia De Martino for their technical support.

⁽¹⁾ The work was carried out under Cedefop's service contract No 2008-0169/AO/ECVL/TB/ Quality-in-VET/021/08 Lot 2.

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Executive summary

In the past decade, European policies and cooperation in education and training has explicitly aimed at opening up qualifications, institutions and systems to one another to enable learners to move more freely and thus benefit from living, learning and working abroad.

This process of change was initiated through a series of European policy initiatives covering higher education, vocational education and training (VET) as well as general education. Some of these initiatives represent a real shift in perspective and approach for professionals and the public alike. This explains why this is still work in progress and emphasises that implementation requires a long-term perspective.

In view of the great variety of education and vocational training traditions and approaches, Member States as well as individual States, like such as Italy, Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom, called in quality assurance to promote necessary transparency and common understanding and trust.

The aim of this study is to analyse the role of accreditation of VET providers in the framework of assuring quality in training provision. National approaches and cases initiated by sectors for accrediting VET providers and programmes in IVET and/or CVET are analysed to define their common elements and differences. Accreditation of an education and training provider is the process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to the provider showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards (Cedefop, 2008c).

The study's findings are based on eight in-depth case studies in seven Member States and four sectoral accreditation systems. The research sample encompassed seven Member States: Denmark, Germany, France (with different approaches for IVET and CVET), Hungary, Italy/Lombardy, Romania and UK/England. The following sectoral approaches for quality in VET have been examined: banking and financial services, European computer driving licence (ECDL) in the ICT sector, hotels and restaurants sector, and the welding sector.

In addition to intensive desk research, case studies were produced through interviews with ministries or sectoral umbrella organisations, accreditation bodies and umbrella organisations of VET providers by applying the same methodology and research instruments (questionnaires for interviews).

In the scope of this study, accreditation is understood as an evaluation tool, applied not by the VET provider but by an external body officially appointed or recognised for this task. This recognition might be attributed by State authorities or – in cases of sectoral accreditation – by a sectoral professional body.

State of play in countries and sectors

In **Denmark**, implementation of an accreditation system has started and applies to newly-created higher (ISCED 5) professional VET programmes (KVU) only. The study focused on KVU programmes because there is no other accreditation in IVET or CVET. It is foreseen to accredit existing programmes step by step until 2012. Although accreditation is focused on programmes, some providers delivering these KVU programmes are indirectly subject to external review as well. The accreditation framework asks for involvement of stakeholders, monitoring output according to a set of quality indicators and transparency with regard to the results achieved. Self-evaluation is a legal requirement for VET providers and their quality management system is evaluated in the accreditation process. A quality plan, procedures for self-evaluation, a follow-up plan and a plan for public dissemination of results must be in place. The accreditation system is seen as positive by most stakeholders, although the procedure puts heavy demands on applicant providers. Of 30 applications for accreditation of new VET programmes, 20 were approved and 10 were refused by 2009.

In **Germany**, VET providers of publicly-funded continuing training for the unemployed are obliged to implement an internal quality management system and must be accredited by a recognised body. A single, nationwide accreditation system applies only in parts of CVET (*Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung - Weiterbildung –AZWV*) because IVET falls under the responsibility of the 16 states/*Länder*. Consequently, quality assurance and accreditation approaches in IVET differ largely. The AZWV quality framework is fixed in guidelines and recommendations set up by an advisory committee which includes representatives from Federal and state levels, social partners, VET providers and independent experts. The requirements

to be fulfilled include customer orientation, methods for fostering individual learning processes, regular evaluation of training programmes including monitoring placements into employment, quality management structures and improvement schemes. Strong emphasis is given to issues related to labour market integration of trainees. An internal quality management system is a central criterion for accreditation. A main result of the accreditation framework was clearing the market. There are about 3 500 providers for publicly-funded CVET accredited; approximately 10 000 providers existed before the system was established. An improvement in quality might be witnessed as around 8% of providers obtained certification without any objections.

The example of **France** represents a quality approach implemented voluntarily addressed at State-owned, already licensed/accredited VET institutions. There are two separate quality labels in place both issued by the Ministry of National Education: the *lycée des métiers* (LdM) for IVET and GretaPlus for both IVET and CVET. A labelling system is different to accreditation, but procedures are comparable because successful accreditation is a precondition for achieving the recognised quality mark. The quality framework for LdM focuses on definition of quality objectives or areas in which applicant institutions have to meet certain standards by developing their own particular 'projects'. Applicant VET institutions need to shape their professional profiles and strengthen partnerships with the regional economy and communities. Operation of an internal quality management system is not explicitly addressed. So far, around 20% of *lycées* have been awarded the LdM label, but the ministry intends to increase the percentage up to 50%. The heart of the quality framework for GretaPlus relates to implementation of tailor-made training programmes including strategies to identify the training needs of beneficiaries, pedagogical objectives, organisation of training, accompaniment of trainees and adequate assessment procedures. Applicant institutions have to demonstrate an effective internal quality management system. By 2010, 45 of 220 institutions had achieved the quality label GretaPlus. Developmental work and communication seems to be better structured and more goal-oriented in the successfully labelled institutions.

Hungary has created a national strategy for reform of its VET system outlining national priorities in lifelong learning as well as for the institutions responsible for implementation of the strategy. Particular attempts have been made to build up a coherent accreditation system for IVET and CVET encompassing higher education institutions as well. The quality framework builds strongly on self-evaluation and internal quality management of VET providers: they have to implement the 'plan, do, check, act' (PDCA)

cycle to plan, monitor, evaluate and improve their activities continuously. Accreditation had a clear impact on the activities of institutions: approximately 1 200 institutions were accredited by 2010 and able to meet high quality requirements leading to better provision of training.

The **Italian** example represents a mixture of a national framework and different regional approaches for accreditation of VET providers. A set of minimum criteria for accreditation of private VET providers applying for public finance has been defined at national level. Although accreditation is obligatory for private providers active in IVET and CVET, it is also mandatory for public education institutions wishing to provide VET when VET is not their institutional role. Regional governments can add on or expand criteria according to regional or local needs. It is up to regional governments to evaluate whether VET providers fulfil these requirements. The quality framework is interpreted and implemented differently by the regions. For the scope of this study Lombardy was selected. By identifying best performing providers and by introducing a ranking system, Lombardy intends to strengthen competition between VET providers. Applicants for accreditation have to provide information on their quality management systems and must have a certification according to ISO 9001:2000.

In **Romania**, implementation of a framework for accreditation and quality assurance forms part of the modernisation of the VET system, in which government deregulation signifies greater autonomy for providers. The national framework is based on the CQAF ⁽²⁾ and includes seven quality principles focused on performance and quality management of VET providers. An internal quality management system is not considered a precondition for being accredited, but within each provider organisation, there should be a committee for quality assurance and evaluation. The committee prepares a quality manual, draws up a self-evaluation report and formulates proposals for improving quality. The main results of the accreditation system have been establishment of a national register which in 2010, included 2 883 authorised providers, of which 468 public, 2 362 private and 53 public-private. The national system operates like a market. Proof of increased quality consists of an annual increase in the number of authorised programmes (18% yearly) and an increase in social partner interest in development of the system.

⁽²⁾ Common quality assurance framework: a set of common principles, guidelines and tools developed by the European forum on quality in VET (2001-02) and the technical working group on quality in VET (TWGQ, 2003-05) in the Copenhagen process, to support Member States in promoting continuous improvement of quality in VET systems; VET providers in improving the training offer; and individuals in acquiring better skills and competences. The quality model was revised and included in the EQARF/EQAVET recommendation (2009) (Cedefop, 2011).

UK/England is an example of transition from an inspection approach towards a supportive accreditation procedure, where the processes for assuring and measuring quality are fit for purpose. It focuses on the accreditation system in England and, with some minor differences, in Wales as well. The quality framework is mutating and consists of a mix of curriculum development, delivery and evaluation of training according to criteria set by various agencies. The national qualifications framework (NQF) is manifestly the most important reference providing for adequate content, quality control, inspection and evaluation within training. Rigorous self-evaluation and effective action planning to address identified areas for improvement should be an integral part of providers' management systems. An annual self-evaluation report is a precondition for accreditation. A development plan should show how the provider will address areas for improvement and build on strengths. Impacts from the accreditation system have spanned a wider VET audience touching in 2009/10 over 2 000 schools, 450 colleges and even a growing collaborative approach across the university sector.

The **banking and financial services** sector is included because of strong demand for transnational mobility of employees due to international mergers and acquisitions, thus creating a need for European-wide standards in training and recognition of qualifications. The quality framework established by the European Banking Training Association is characterised by strong focus on delivery of certificates according to assessment of learning outcomes commonly agreed between the European bank training network (EBTN) and its member organisations and application of a standard examination model. Additionally, the framework asks for a system of quality assurance that includes regular evaluation, review and updating of assessment procedures. Existence of a quality management system is a precondition for accreditation, and provision of a self-evaluation report is part of the accreditation procedure. The quality management system should document the roles and responsibilities of those involved in evaluation of programmes. Within the past four to five years around 7 500 certificates for individuals were issued by accredited training institutions and demand is increasing.

The **European computer driving licence (ECDL)** is a certificate issued by a highly innovative sector, where qualifications of employees are permanently changing due to newly emerging business fields. The accreditation system does not cover the training part nor individuals but focuses on testing and test centres only. Even if test centres prepare their candidates, these activities are not subject to quality assurance and accreditation. The focus of the ECDL system is purely to guarantee the correctness and transparency of

the testing phase, which is to assess candidates' abilities independently from their training. Test centres are not required to run an internal quality management system. Within the ECDL Foundation a quality management system was established and through its licensee audit programme the foundation aims to transfer its quality standards to licensees. The ECDL label is primarily a commercial promotion that gives more credibility to the certificate and contributes to stability of the provider.

In the **hotels and restaurants** sector high quality and European-wide common standards are needed for the training and education of employees to meet the expectations of a growing variety of international customers. As an example of accreditation and quality assurance a licensing model operated by an American professional organisation was analysed. The quality framework licensed by the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AH&LEI) focuses on the training and certification part of standards regarding human and physical resources. Licensed affiliates are supposed to use common curricula and obligatory teaching and learning materials. The scheme does not require a quality management system at the training provider. Instead, quality of training is ensured through AH&LEI as this organisation delivers the content and syllabus for training programmes. Providers that hold a licensee affiliation of AH&LEI have a strong competitive edge at regional or national levels.

With **welding** another technology-driven sector is represented, where high quality standards due to European safety and security regulations are applied, and where accreditation of VET provision is particularly relevant for public safety. The quality framework for accreditation of VET providers contains standards regarding human and physical resources of the provider and requests a quality management system. All providers have to operate with common curricula and obligatory learning and teaching materials, particularly to assure quality of training which includes monitoring and evaluation of the training process and its results. A quality management system is a compulsory prerequisite for starting the accreditation process, and national umbrella organisations offer applicant VET providers a manual to establish this system. The number of diplomas issued by the European Welding Foundation (EWF) can stand as a proxy indicator for the value and reputation of the accreditation system. The cumulated number of EWF diplomas issued increased from less than 16 000 in 1995 to more than 100 000 in 2007, which indicates significant market penetration of the system. Providers can use the name, logo and high reputation of the national umbrella organisation for their promotion.

Common elements and differences

There are similar roots but different motivations for establishing the national and sectoral accreditation systems presented in this report. National systems tend to regulate the market for (mainly continuing) training provision and are linked to various reforms of VET systems where individuals/learners are in focus. In comparison, development of sectoral accreditation systems is more directly linked to coordinated delivery of skills and competences responding to specific sector demands for a qualified labour force at European and international levels. Although these systems set up by sectors and their professional organisations refer to continuing vocational education and training as well, their main focus is to ensure standard requirements for training are applied uniformly all through the sector, irrespective of the country in which they operate. The National accreditation requirements do not apply to them. In addition, they often refer mainly to testing procedures.

Both national and sectoral accreditation systems are characterised by strong, widely consolidated legal and quality frameworks, which are continuously fine-tuned and adapted in their methodologies. Detailed information is made available to VET providers that intend to apply for accreditation. Appropriate application tools are widely accessible via Internet, and accreditation bodies disseminate results of the accreditation process online to the public.

Accreditation is compulsory in Denmark (for new higher VET professional programmes) and UK/England, while in other countries it is a voluntary process, but successful accreditation is a precondition for having access to public funding. This requirement is a strong incentive for providers to get accredited. In some countries accreditation is a precondition for delivery of recognised diplomas, which is also the case in sectors. As already mentioned, in France the two quality labels for State-owned institutions are voluntary, but they are only issued to successful VET providers who are already licensed to operate.

Different bodies are in place to carry out accreditation. In Italy, regional authorities are responsible; in France, under the authority of the Ministry of National Education, special committees have been put in place; in Denmark, Hungary and Romania, governmental bodies are charged with accreditation. In England, different external agencies are engaged according to the awarded qualifications. In Germany, accreditation of VET providers is market driven where 27 external agencies are currently active, after they have been recognised by a government body. In the sectors analysed, accreditation

is undertaken by the same organisation that awards professional diplomas and is a fully self-organised process in which government bodies are not involved. To evaluate applications, all sectoral organisations have established special committees consisting of technical and educational experts in the respective area of training.

The average duration of the accreditation process varies between one month (Italy) and 15 months (France, UK). Public announcement of successfully accredited institutions is a standard everywhere, and in most cases this is done over the web, which means information is accessible for everyone. In comparison to national accreditation, the procedure for accreditation in two of the analysed sectors is short. It lasts between 15 days (ECDL) and 6-12 months (hotels and restaurants sector, welding sector).

Successful accreditation is valid for a period of between one and five years, with the shortest cycle of one year being applied in Italy. A renewal after three years is obligatory in Germany and for the GretaPlus label in France; in Hungary and Romania accreditation must be renewed after four years, and the LdM label for IVET in France asks for renewal after five years. In the welding sector the shortest period for renewal of accreditation is two years. Renewal is combined with interim monitoring called regular surveillance. In the hotels and restaurants sector successful accreditation is valid for five years; the time for renewal in the banking sector and for ECDL is three years.

Results and impacts of accreditation

Taken together, results of analysed accreditation systems point to the following: systems are accepted widely by providers; they have captured the market and proved that delivery of VET according to pre-defined quality standards can be assured. Weak performers disappear from the market, successfully accredited providers can increase their credibility. Sectoral frameworks foster quality standards – without direct involvement of public authorities – and European-wide comparability, which is not yet the case between national systems but might be seen as a future challenge.

On accreditation the analysed national and sectoral systems are quite close to one another. The main procedural steps of the accreditation procedure are widely the same and have been summarised in a prototype of the accreditation process. Given its shared application, this prototype could become part of a common systematic strategy to be developed and

implemented on accreditation in VET at European level, as an integral part of existing European cooperation on quality assurance.

By making use of a quality label the sectoral examples demonstrate the added value of accreditation in VET and create external impacts to the business world. ECDL is an interesting example of branding. In national systems recognised quality labels for successful providers such as GretaPlus in France rarely exist. Enormous potential to increase attractiveness of VET is there to be exploited.

In national quality frameworks, requirements for internal quality managements systems are often not fully operationalised. Data collection methods are rarely specified, although collection of information is a precondition to evaluate achievement of quality objectives and serious efforts for improvement of quality should build on reliable information. Dissemination of results is another issue and is not sufficiently represented in national requirements. Demand for establishment of a complaint procedure is another weak point. Apart from the welding sector, requirements for quality management systems in sectors are even fewer than in national systems. Dissemination of results and participation of stakeholders is not an issue at all.

In the analysed sectoral approaches the number of criteria for accreditation is quite limited, while national accreditation systems apply a broad list of criteria against which provider organisation are evaluated. These criteria might encompass financial management issues as well as the accounting system, data on infrastructure, premises, equipment, competences of teachers, technical and administrative personnel. National accreditation systems put more emphasis on regulations for the training process than sectoral frameworks. They are concentrated mainly on examination and testing procedures and on certification of individuals. However, they leave the learning process, and thus the needs of learners, fully out of the scope. Sectoral systems, especially those applied in the banking sector and for ECDL, are possibly too focused and lean.

In many national accreditation systems input-orientation still prevails and measurement of output and outcomes receives less attention. This finding confirms that specifications for data collection methods are rather neglected, thus hampering serious quality management.

The main function of the analysed accreditation systems is to assure that minimum standards in delivery of VET are respected. They rarely push forward dynamics towards continuous improvement of training quality in VET provider organisations. It is difficult to combine these two functions: respect of minimum standards and continuous improvement of training quality. Most

analysed accreditation systems focus on certifying what is in place and pay little attention to improvement. Therefore there is room for enlarging their scope to include an improvement function.

Challenges for the future

The main challenge for the future is to develop accreditation into a driving force for improving quality in VET. More support for VET providers in shaping their individual quality objectives and in implementation of quality criteria should help to achieve this goal. Further, accreditation systems should put even stronger focus on the effectiveness of quality management systems of VET providers. Strengthening outcome orientation is another issue to improve quality of training services.

Evolving links between the VET sector and the employment system could help to put more emphasis on output and outcome criteria. Involvement of stakeholders is a key issue in efforts to orient the accreditation process and applied criteria more strongly towards the outcomes of training. A more systematic measurement of results and impacts of training is another approach to improve quality of VET and employability of VET students. However, appropriate tools for VET providers to collect respective data are sometimes missing, thus restricting comparisons with other providers.

As part of the criteria for accreditation, VET providers should build on the set of quality indicators included in the recommendation on establishment of a European common quality assurance reference framework for VET ⁽³⁾. This set of indicators provides a backbone that might be extended by additional indicators according to particular circumstances.

The case studies undertaken in UK/England, Denmark and Hungary have identified some interesting developments for a closer relationship between VET and higher education towards creation of a common framework for accreditation in a lifelong learning perspective.

According to regulations foreseen in Germany, Denmark and Hungary, accreditation of VET providers and VET programmes is commonly accepted, when the accreditation is awarded by a foreign body that has been recognised in another European country according to the same standards.

⁽³⁾ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 155, 8.7.2009, p. 1.

The study has identified several elements that could help to focus accreditation more strongly on quality issues in VET: closer links between the VET sector and the labour market, improved involvement of stakeholders, increased regional cooperation and stronger orientation towards measurement of outputs and outcomes together with promotion of a relevant set of indicators.

Internal quality management by the VET provider is one of the most crucial issues to improve quality at provider level. This instrument allows providers to strive continuously for better quality on their own, independently from accreditation. An effective internal quality management system should be defined as a requirement sine qua non in all accreditation systems. But it can be a general challenge for every VET system to specify the requirements for the effective operation of internal quality management.

Current accreditation systems are characterised by ambiguity between the impetus to contribute to quality in VET and their accountability function. Findings of this study suggest a multistep approach in accreditation of VET providers to overcome this situation. In a first step of basic accreditation, to check accountability, VET providers should demonstrate their conformity with and commitment to existing regulations, standards and criteria. For training organisations, which have been accredited successfully according to accountability standards, additional steps for achieving excellence should be put in place on a voluntary basis. This work towards excellence should be explicitly quality driven. Providers applying for accreditation according to the excellence framework should demonstrate sustainable improvement trends against indicators of output and outcome. In further steps of an excellence framework the performance of these providers could be benchmarked nationally and internationally. Outstanding providers should be rewarded.

Conclusions and recommendations for stakeholders

National and sectoral accreditation systems should encourage VET providers to:

- shape their own quality objectives apart from the standardised set of quality criteria applied in the accreditation process;
- monitor and regularly review evaluation results to identify weaknesses, install quality management as a permanent process and organise change and improvement.

Umbrella organisations of VET providers could support an exchange of experiences with internal quality management systems, thus supporting providers to identify crucial issues, learn from one another and make their quality management systems more effective.

Within their national quality frameworks Member States should strengthen involvement of stakeholders:

- VET providers and their umbrella organisations should be given a voice on the board of accreditation bodies. They should present experiences of providers applying for accreditation and express their views on the criteria and standards applied in the accreditation process;
- more weight should be given to output and outcomes of VET provision. Respective measurement tools should be made available for providers within the EU, that allow for collection of valid and reliable information and for comparability and benchmarking of results achieved;
- a system of incentives for VET providers having delivered good training quality demonstrated by measurement of outstanding performance should be established;
- more visibility should be given to achievements of quality by implementing and strengthening respective marketing activities. Creation of a quality label for successfully accredited VET providers would help to increase attractiveness of the sector;
- in strengthening cooperation between accreditation bodies in VET and higher education, Member States could identify common elements and make progress in establishing a coherent framework for accreditation covering all sectors of their educational system without neglecting the peculiarities of each sector;
- as a result of European cooperation between Member States, common recognition of accreditations in VET should no longer be restricted but become a European-wide standard including all Member States.

Sectoral umbrella organisations having established an accreditation system for VET providers:

- could go for a cross-sectoral exchange of experiences to discuss differences and commonalities in their approaches, to compare and learn from one another;
- should be aware of trends and developments in national accreditation systems;
- some sectoral quality systems should shift their focus from assessment and examination procedures and pay more attention to the training process and needs of learners;

- sectoral systems should strengthen the quality dimension of their accreditation systems, by encouraging their providers to operate an internal quality management system. This element should become a prerequisite for accreditation.

European-wide cooperation and exchange of experience:

- should encompass bodies for accreditation established for national or sectoral accreditation in VET. Setting up a network of accreditation bodies that includes inspectorate institutions should be considered;
- improved European cooperation should pave the way for development and implementation of a common strategy for accreditation in VET, embedded into existing European cooperation on quality assurance and consisting of several common standards and guidelines, criteria and instruments to be applied voluntarily;
- efforts could build on shared common elements identified in this report;
- further research and studies into developments in the higher education area are needed. Common standards and guidelines for quality assurance established in this area could stand as a blueprint for a similar framework for the VET sector.

Introduction

Increasing public and private investments into human resources and educational systems is a top priority of the Lisbon agenda and of the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). Among other objectives, by 2020, an average of at least 40% of the younger generation should have tertiary education and the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10% (European Commission, 2010, p. 3). But increased investments into educational systems will not automatically increase their effectiveness and efficiency even if the quantitative targets are achieved. This is where the quality issue comes in: 'This requires improving the quality of our education, strengthening our research performance, promoting innovation and knowledge transfer throughout the Union, making full use of information and communication technologies and ensuring that innovative ideas can be turned into new products and services that create growth, quality jobs and help address European and global societal challenges' (European Commission, 2010, p. 9-10).

In many Member States and more and more frequently, accreditation is used as a governance tool to ensure the quality of training institutions and training programmes. For example, accreditation systems are in place in the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Slovenia and Finland. In Cyprus, Estonia and Malta an accreditation system is under construction. It is against this background that Cedefop has carried out a study with the objective to review and to analyse the role of accreditation of VET providers in the framework of assuring the quality of training provision. Different national and sectoral approaches towards accreditation had to be analysed to identify their common elements and differences. Based on analysis of a sample of existing national, regional and sectoral frameworks for accreditation and quality assurance (QA), the study defined a set of common European guidelines and criteria for accreditation of VET providers with particular emphasis on delivering a supportive tool for providers who wish to apply for accreditation.

Scope of the study and methodology

As already mentioned in the executive summary, accreditation is understood in the present study as an evaluation tool, applied not by VET providers themselves but by an external body officially appointed or recognised for this task. This recognition might be attributed by State authorities or – in the case of sectoral accreditation – by a sectoral professional body. Frequently, accreditation and certification are used synonymously because they are both about external verification of quality standards. But following Cedefop work in the field we use accreditation when referring to VET providers and/or programmes while certification is used when referring to persons. However, in the international bibliography on quality, accreditation of organisations is also called certification as in ISO 9000ff, by which many organisations are certified. Insisting on differences, we will discover that accreditation and certification of organisations have a slightly different focus. Certification is about compliance with procedural standards, rules and criteria as defined by a methodological framework for quality assurance and quality management, as the standards of ISO 9000ff. Accreditation, in addition, encompasses recognition by a professional or public body, and therefore apart from procedural issues in accreditation other concerns are considered as well. For public accreditation systems these concerns may address the adequacy of a training programme for the national or regional labour market or its relevance for achievement of certain policy objectives, such as local human resources development, whereas sectoral approaches will include professional standards as defined by the relevant sectoral umbrella organisation and will not deal with more general issues.

At sectoral level in Europe there is an interesting and challenging development taking place particularly in CVET. In the analysed cases, accreditation is organised by professional organisations of VET providers and institutions operating in a certain sector themselves. In these sectors and branches VET providers have collaborated to build up their own umbrella organisations, which then function as an accreditation body for providers active in the relevant sectors and branches. These networks or sector organisations of VET providers have developed their own accreditation systems and procedures, and are creating their own quality labels without including any public bodies. We have

included them in our analysis to get a better insight into accreditation overall by comparing them to national approaches.

2.1. Objectives and research questions

In general, the objective of accreditation of a VET provider or VET training programme is to certify that the provider or programme meets publicly or professionally defined requirements, predefined standards of quality and certain policy objectives.

In European VET systems, accreditation is organised differently, reflecting not only national, subnational and sectoral traditions and structures of VET but also the nature and current state of national or sectoral quality frameworks. There is, however, a common denominator in all activities related to accreditation. They consist of external evaluations according to predefined requirements (objectives, criteria, standards of quality) for VET. They lead to reasonable judgements, and finally to a decision with certain implications for the VET provider and/or quality of its training programmes.

Accreditation for VET providers addresses the following issues:

- types of accreditation/external evaluation of VET providers carried out in Member States and by certain sectors;
- requirements, criteria and indicators for accreditation of VET providers, with main focus on the character of indicators used (input, process, output, outcome, impacts);
- relationship between internal self-evaluation/internal quality management of VET providers and external accreditation;
- the kind and degree of methodological and organisational support, provided for VET institutions who wish to apply for accreditation;
- the relationship between quality assurance, quality management and accreditation, and in particular the contribution of accreditation to the overall quality of VET providers and quality of the (national or sectoral) VET system.

Despite variations between different systems and procedures for accreditation, there is a set of common features in understanding what accreditation means:

- accreditation is concerned with the quality of VET provider organisations (objects of accreditation);
- the accreditation process follows transparent standards, regulations and rules;

- accreditation is a process of external quality review used to scrutinise VET provider organisations for quality assurance and by intention for further improvement of quality, too, although the extent to which this latter applies will have to be explored in this study;
- accreditation implies clearly defined consequences resulting from a formal decision on the application of the provider, which in positive cases leads to formal recognition of the provider (including the right to award qualifications);
- accreditation is not a one-off procedure but is given for a certain period of time and needs to be renewed to remain effective.

To be precise, the study is about the role of accreditation of VET providers for assuring the quality of training and services provision. The relationship between accreditation and quality assurance affords some clarification on the concepts of quality and quality assurance.

The term 'quality' refers to a certain characteristic or condition of something and thus always needs a reference point. Quality content has to be defined in relation to this reference point, which in this study is provision of training and related services. This immediately brings clients and their satisfaction with the offered services to the forefront. Nowadays, many definitions understand quality as an accomplishment of standards to achieve sustainable satisfaction of clients. Other definitions express similar notions, for example by stressing fulfilment of clients' needs or responding to clients' expectations. The common nucleus in all these definitions is the client, the product or the services delivered.

There is another set of definitions, which focus on accomplishment of standards and rules necessary to deliver the product or the service in good quality. Thus, in EN ISO 9000:2005 quality is defined as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics responds to given demands.

Sometimes this understanding of quality is called technical quality, whereas client-oriented understanding is called relative quality. With technical quality it is stressed that production of products or delivery of services is accomplished according to prescribed standards, regulations and rules and that the products or services are useful, suitable and fit for purpose. Relative quality is a flexible concept as clients are not a homogenous group. Clients have different needs, varying expectations and individual demands, which might require continuing change including adaptation of standards, regulations and rules from the organisation.

The two understandings of quality are not contradictory. They just put their light on different aspects, both of which are important and complementary

to each other. Technical and relative quality will both have to be considered when analysing the role of accreditation for assuring the quality of training and services provision in VET.

This study is about assurance of quality and again there are different understandings and several terms around, such as quality management, quality assurance, quality control, quality assessment, and quality improvement. In practice, these terms are often used as substitutes for one another but they have slightly different meanings when taking a closer look from a scientific point of view. Quality management is considered as an umbrella term, encompassing all the processes necessary to create and direct methods, rules and procedures to ensure quality in an institution. Quality management includes the specific notions of the other terms. Quality assurance tries to avoid unfavourable developments and is intended towards compliance with binding standards and prevention of bad quality. Quality control is oriented towards collection of information to correct unfavourable developments and thus is a necessary precondition to ensure measures of quality assurance. Quality assessment goes beyond and is about measurement of output and outcomes based on predefined objectives for quality. The term quality improvement is understood as continuing change and improvement of processes and performance to fulfil better the quality objectives (Cedefop, 2009a, p. 9).

This study covers both practice and ‘theory’ of accreditation and its role for assuring technical and relative quality of training and services provision in VET. The theory was covered by desk research and documentary analysis, while the implications, experiences and evaluation of current practices were captured through interviews in both national and sectoral case studies.

2.2. Research sample

The study aimed at analysing different approaches to accreditation of VET providers and VET programmes in seven EU Member States and in four sectors to identify their common elements and differences. Countries were selected to provide examples from bigger and smaller Member States and from ‘older’ and ‘newer’ ones. Accreditation in initial VET (IVET) and continuing VET (CVET) were included where an internal VET providers quality system exists, something largely missing at present in VET accreditation policies. The research sample encompassed the following countries and sectors.

National accreditation systems analysed in this study cover both IVET and CVET, apart from Denmark and Germany. In Denmark, implementation of an

accreditation system has started and is applied to new IVET programmes only. Existing programmes will be accredited step by step from 2012. Accreditation focuses on programmes, but parts of VET provider organisations are also indirectly subject to external review.

In Germany, since July 2004, VET providers engaged in publicly-funded continuing training for the unemployed are obliged to implement an internal quality management system and must be accredited by a recognised body according to AZWV. It must be noted that a single nationwide accreditation system operates in this part of the CVET sector only. IVET is not included in this study, because as already stated in the executive summary, it comes under the authority of the 16 *Länder* each having its own approach to quality assurance and accreditation. It was out of the scope of this study with its budgetary and time restrictions to analyse the 16 *Länder* approaches.

The French example is included because of a quality approach implemented voluntarily, targeted at State-owned VET institutions already licensed to operate. In France, there are two separate types of quality labels for IVET and CVET in place. Although a quality label is slightly different from accreditation, both approaches have been included in the scope of this study as the label is given only after external review and successful recognition of the provider organisation against a national quality framework. Accreditation is a prerequisite for awarding a quality label.

Italy is included as an example of a mixture of a national framework and different regional approaches for accreditation of VET providers. At national level a set of minimum criteria for accreditation of VET providers was set up, where regional governments can add to or expand criteria according to regional or local needs. It is up to regional governments to evaluate whether VET providers fulfil these requirements. Accreditation procedures vary from region to region. As in the case of Germany, it was out of the scope of this study to analyse the 21 regional approaches to quality assurance and accreditation. The Lombardy region was selected as an 'interesting case' because by identifying best performing providers and by introducing a ranking system, it is shaping an accreditation approach that, instead of concentrating on achievement of minimum standards, promotes competition between VET providers and supports improvement of quality.

Traditionally in the United Kingdom, colleges and providers are expected to respond to a large number of different quality standards and measures before being accredited. In the past this has led to a compliance culture and has generated excessive bureaucracy. In recent years several initiatives have been made to overcome this approach and UK/England can stand as an example

of transition from an inspection approach towards a supportive accreditation procedure, where the processes for assuring and measuring quality are fit for purpose. The UK example focuses on the accreditation system that operates in England and with some minor differences in Wales as well, while the Scottish system is so unique it cannot form part of the system analysed here.

Other country examples are Hungary and Romania. Both ‘newer’ Member States have created a national strategy for reform of their VET systems, where they define national priorities in the context of lifelong learning and establish the institutions responsible for implementation of the strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to help development of a quality approach by providing conceptual, methodological, and planning conditions for its implementation. Particular attempts have been made to build up a coherent accreditation system for IVET and CVET encompassing higher education institutions as well. In Hungary, accreditation of both providers and programmes is applied, but the case study analysed here focuses on accreditation of providers only.

Selecting sectors to be analysed proved more complex than selecting national accreditation examples despite all their peculiarities. The criteria used to select sector samples referred principally to the need for high quality standards and mobility within or between sectors.

Table 1. Selected countries and their scope of accreditation in VET

	IVET		CVET	
	providers	programmes	providers	programmes
Denmark	x ⁽¹⁾	x		
Germany	-	-	x	x
France ⁽²⁾	x	x	x	x
Hungary	x ⁽³⁾	x ⁽³⁾	x	x
Italy/Lombardy region	x	x	x	x
Romania	x	x	x	x
UK/England	x	x	x	x

(1) Parts of the provider organisation are covered for certain programmes.

(2) In France, two different accreditation systems for IVET and CVET are in place.

(3) As far as programmes for adult students are provided.

The banking and financial services sector was included as an example of a sector with strong demand for high transnational mobility of employees due

to international mergers and acquisitions, thus creating a need for European-wide standards in training and recognition of qualifications.

The hotel and restaurant sector was chosen because, due to European integration and globalisation, a growing variety of international customers has to be served. High-quality and European-wide common standards are needed for training and educating employees to meet the expectations of customers.

The European computer driving licence (ECDL) was selected because this certificate is issued by a highly innovative sector (ICT) where qualifications of employees are in permanent change and development due to new business fields emerging.

The welding sector is the second technology-driven example. It was chosen because of high quality standards imposed by European safety and security regulations. Accreditation of VET provision is particularly important for overall public safety. Welding is one of the most interesting examples of quality assurance through accreditation organised by professional bodies at international level.

A clear distinction between accreditation of VET provider organisations and accreditation of programmes can be made for the welding sector only. For the two main types of VET, only the accreditation system applied in the hotels and restaurants sector covers provision of both IVET and CVET. In this case, the VET programme is accredited and quality assessed 'automatically' as the VET provider has to operate a training programme designed and regularly updated by the sectoral accreditation body. In contrast, the following two accreditation examples are rarely interested in delivery of a training programme: in the banking and financial services sector, accreditation of training providers focuses on examination procedures, and in the European computer driving licence example, accreditation to become a centre for awarding a licence covers the examination procedure only.

Table 2. Selected sectors and scope of accreditation in VET

	IVET		CVET	
	providers	programmes	providers	programmes
Banking and financial services			x	x ⁽¹⁾
ECDL			x ⁽²⁾	x ⁽²⁾
Hotels and restaurants	x	x ⁽³⁾	x	x ⁽³⁾
Welding			x	x

⁽¹⁾ Focused on the examination procedure.

⁽²⁾ Covers examination procedure only.

⁽³⁾ Provider has to operate the accreditation body programme.

2.3. Methodology

For researching the selected examples, the same approach was followed. Based on results of desk research in each case study face-to-face interviews were held with representatives of national ministries or sectoral umbrella organisations, with bodies responsible for accreditation of VET providers in the respective country or sector and finally with VET providers themselves or their umbrella organisations. Whenever possible, the view of an independent expert knowing the relevant system was grasped in an interview to get some background information. The same interview grids were used to prepare and conduct the interviews.

Table 3 indicates the interviews conducted in the selected countries. For each country it was intended to include the views of the main stakeholders in the accreditation process: the ministry, the accreditation body and a VET provider or an umbrella organisation of providers. Whenever possible, the view of an independent VET expert was included, too. In practice, this general methodological formula had to be applied flexibly. In France, for example, there is no permanent accreditation body; instead external review of VET providers appealing for the quality label is undertaken by different groups of experts, some of which are appointed by the Ministry of Education.

Table 3. Conducted interviews – Countries

	DK	DE	FR	HU	IT	RO	UK/EN
Ministry	x	x	x	x	x (1)	x	
Accreditation body	x	x	-	x	x (1)	x	x
VET (umbrella) organisations	x	x	x	x	x		x
Experts		x		x			x

(1) Regional ministry which is also the accreditation body.

The role of sectoral umbrella organisations in accreditation corresponds to the role of ministries in national accreditation systems. Therefore, representatives of sectoral umbrella organisations were interviewed for the sectoral case studies. Different to most national cases, the accreditation body is not a particular institution but just a branch or even a specific committee inside the sectoral umbrella organisation. Interviews took place with chairpersons or members of these accreditation committees. To include a different perspective on these sectoral accreditations, additional interviews were held with representatives

of VET provider organisations and/or independent experts in a particular sector.

Table 4. **Conducted interviews - sectors**

	Banking and financial services	ECDL	Hotels and restaurants	Welding
Sectoral umbrella organisation	X	X	X	X
Accreditation body	X	X	X	X
VET provider organisation		X		X
Experts	X	X	X	X

National approaches towards accreditation of VET

3.1. Denmark

3.1.1. VET context

The Danish VET system is based on the principle of dual training (periods in school alternate with periods of training in enterprises), involvement of social partners at all levels and the principle of lifelong learning, IVET and CVET are integrated to ensure coherence between qualifications and competence levels in line with development of the national qualification framework (Danish Ministry of Education, 2008a; Cedefop, Refernet, 2009a). Today, the system is highly modularised and flexible. It offers possibilities for both further studies, and for partial qualifications. The overall political aim is to make it an inclusive system (to keep drop-out rates at a low level). Current political focus is on increasing the interaction and coherence between IVET and CVET by defining objectives in terms of competences to be acquired. CVET focuses on development of skills closely related to the workplace and the job functions of CVET participants. Extensive collaboration was initiated between CVET providers and enterprises, and CVET courses are often provided as on-the-job training. CVET is primarily targeted at unskilled and low-skilled workers. Vocational education and training includes vocational education and training programmes (VET), social and health education programmes as well as programmes in agriculture, forestry, maritime studies, etc. These VET programmes are of two to five years' duration, the most typical being three and a half to four years. IVET programmes are sandwich-type programmes in which theoretical and practical education at a vocational college (30-50% of the time) alternates with practical training in an approved company or organisation (50-70% of the time).

For the approach to quality in VET the main characteristics are that VET providers have a great deal of autonomy in terms of adapting the VET they provide to local needs and demands. Quality assurance has been on the political agenda in Denmark since the beginning of the 1990s, with the introduction of a new governance framework based on taximeter grants per student. The aim of the framework was to improve the overall responsiveness and effectiveness of the VET system by encouraging VET providers to

respond more autonomously and rapidly to changes in the labour market stemming from technological, organisational and societal changes.

Procedures for quality assurance are integrated into the VET system due to continuing dialogue between all stakeholders at all different levels of the system, and to the short distance between those in positions of power, both culturally and geographically. Denmark is a small country, stakeholders know one another and work together across the system, and there is widespread confidence and common trust among them.

Quality in education and training was introduced and reinforced in two successive stages called 'waves'. During the 1990s, quality assurance and development were systematically made compulsory for all VET providers, and the overall policy objective of the 'first wave' was to establish a quality system for systematic self-evaluation and follow-up at provider level. In parallel the role of inspection and external evaluation was toned down until the late 1990s. In the 'second wave' from 2000 onwards, output monitoring gained greater importance: six quality indicators were formulated for the entire educational system and overall external monitoring of the system was strengthened. External verification – explicitly referred to as accreditation – started in 2004, when the Danish Evaluation Institute accredited training programmes in higher education and included accreditation of centres for further education (CVU) resulting in the quality title 'university college' since 2005.

Accreditation is obligatory by law since 1 April 2008. Every year there are two accreditation cycles: one in autumn, one in spring. In autumn 2008, the first applications for new educational programmes were filed. After the concluding judgement on these applications, applicants and experts were asked to evaluate the process, which resulted in minor changes to the guidelines. The second round of application started in March 2009. For existing educational programmes, the first accreditation cycle was planned from 2009 to 2010 and a second cycle from 2010 to 2012.

3.1.2. Accreditation system

Accreditation of VET programmes and VET provision is prescribed by law since 2007 (in force since April 2008) for new training programmes (such as real estate agent), for existing training programmes (such as dental technician) and for training provided by a school or academy. So far there is no explicit accreditation of VET providers, but indirectly the criteria for institutions are tested in connection with accreditation of training provision.

New training programmes have to be accredited before they are allowed to start. The initiative for an application is mostly via cooperation of several schools. In autumn 2008, the first accreditation cycle started, followed in spring 2009 by the second one. Existing programmes will be accredited step by step, the first accreditation process has just started (nurse training) and it is planned to have all existing educational programmes accredited by 2012. This will include short-cycle educational programmes at so-called academies (KVU) which correspond to IVET programmes in other European countries.

3.1.2.1. *Quality framework*

There is no single nationwide quality approach but nine common axes, principles and measures at system level and different approaches at both system and provider levels have been defined by the Ministry of Education.

Table 5. Axes and measures of the quality framework in Denmark

Involvement of stakeholders
Common national guidelines
Output monitoring
Quality rules
Ministerial approval, monitoring and inspection
Testing and examination
Transparency and openness
Evaluations by the Danish Evaluation Institute
International cooperation and surveys

Source: Danish Ministry of Education, 2008b.

These apply to the entire educational system but they are given different weight and take different forms within different parts of the system. For the VET system a 10th measure should be included: funding of innovation and development projects.

The Danish approach to quality is based on the CQAF (common quality assurance framework), which has been specified differently for IVET and CVET. As an overall strategic orientation, output monitoring has become increasingly important over the years. Responding to this policy objective, the Ministry of Education introduced six quality indicators for measuring output and outcome:

- (a) test and examination results,
- (b) completion rates,
- (c) completion times,
- (d) drop-out rates and times,
- (e) transition rates to other education programmes,
- (f) transition rates to the labour market.

For IVET, all six indicators are considered relevant, whereas in CVET, only completion rates are relevant for the short CVET modules.

While focus in the 1990s was primarily on the process, and motivating VET providers to set up quality assurance and development systems, the trend is now to promote quality by providing incentives. VET providers have to fulfil specific policy goals to receive earmarked financial grants. In IVET, this principle is called 'value for money'. The Ministry of Education specifies priority areas and offers additional funding to providers if they attain a number of goals within those areas. Thus in 2004, four priority areas concerning quality were defined:

- learners' systematic quality development at colleges, specifically focusing on proficiency and flexibility;
- teachers' strategic skills development, specifically aimed at motivating them to update and renew their professional skills, and to use new forms of teaching and working, such as pedagogical IT skills;
- professionalisation of school management;
- strengthening colleges' contact with enterprises and the local community.

At the end of the year, colleges document quality activities initiated, and achieved results, to apply for quality grants. The documentation has to be published on the institution's website, and a report (questionnaire) must be sent to the ministry.

Self-evaluation has become a legal requirement. All VET providers must have a quality management system and a quality plan as well as procedures for self-evaluation within eight priority areas, a follow-up plan and a plan for public dissemination of results.

The quality rules for IVET also apply to in-company training, whereby trade committees are responsible for ongoing quality assurance and development of in-company training, in cooperation with local education committees. The ministerial focus has been on the school-based part of IVET programmes, as in-company training is under the jurisdiction of the social partners.

In CVET, a 'supply policy' has been introduced. Since January 2004, providers are obliged to draw up a policy stating how the institution will

ensure that the region's labour market needs will be fulfilled, within its budget targets. This 'supply policy' will be a precondition for providers' receipt of financial grants.

CVET providers are also obliged to set up a quality management system, formulate a follow-up plan and a plan for dissemination, and self-evaluate regularly. Figure 1 summarises the quality rules in VET and respective requirements for self-evaluation and quality development that have to be fulfilled by VET providers.

Figure 1. Quality rules in the Danish VET system

A: The VET college must have a quality system

B: The VET college must have a procedure for self-evaluation and quality development on eight specific areas

C: The VET college must have a follow-up plan based on the self-evaluation, and publish it

Source: Danish Ministry of Education, 2008b.

For VET, the Ministry of Education plays an important role in both approval and inspection of VET provided:

- it confers upon institutions the right to provide specific VET programmes. Providers must fulfil a number of conditions, and if these are not fulfilled approval may be revoked;
- it continuously monitors VET providers/provision, by systematically collecting data on educational results (intake, trainee flows, completion rates, marks, employment, etc.) and finance;
- it undertakes a legal, financial and pedagogical inspection of VET. The process of inspection takes various forms, and is based on several inputs. These include desk research and analysis based on selected data, and meetings and/or visits to selected institutions with specific colleges and trade committees.

The following information is included in the ministry's inspection of quality at vocational colleges: annual reports, websites, and data on completion rates, drop-out rates, grades, and transition rates to employment and further education. For dual training IVET programmes (*erhvervsuddannelser – EUD*) a system of approval based on quality criteria has been implemented. Enterprises that want to train young people have to be approved by a trade committee (*faglig udvalg*) according to a 10-point plan of quality criteria. Quality rules for IVET are defined by law ⁽⁴⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ For an excerpt in English of Order No 1518 of 13/12/2007, Chapter 2: Quality assurance in IVET, see Danish Ministry of Education, 2008b, Annex 2: Quality rules.

3.1.2.2. *Accreditation bodies*

There is one accreditation body for all educational programmes supervised by the Ministry of Education: the Danish Evaluation Institute (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut – EVA). For higher education programmes, which are under the umbrella of the Ministry of Science, another accreditation body is responsible: ACE Denmark – Danish Accreditation Institute.

EVA was established in 1999 as an external, independent body for quality assurance and development of education and teaching. The institute is responsible for evaluating all fields of education in Denmark, from basic schooling to higher education under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Each year, EVA submits a plan of action outlining evaluations and other activities to be undertaken in the year to come. The ministry ensures that the plan is in line with the objectives set out for the EVA. EVA's task is to evaluate education and teaching, whereas evaluations of educational institutions' overall activities can only take place on prior approval from the Ministry of Education.

According to the decree-law on accreditation of July 2008, EVA:

- performs its function in accordance with the standards adopted by European Ministers for Education;
- establishes panels with external professional experts for elaboration of accreditation reports;
- publishes on its website a guideline on the requirements for accreditation and a proposal for documentation of criteria and principles for establishment of expert panels and accreditation reports sent to the Accreditation Council;
- sends an accreditation report together with a recommendation for a positive or negative decision, based on the expert panel evaluation, to the Accreditation Council;
- examines, at the request of the Accreditation Council, if an accredited training programme or training provision still fulfils accreditation criteria;
- functions as technical secretary to the Accreditation Council and takes part in Board meetings where accreditation decisions are discussed.

According to this decree-law, other internationally approved quality assurance agencies fulfilling EU standards may also carry out an accreditation report as the basis for a decision on the application for accreditation by the Accreditation Council, which is the supervisory accreditation institution in Denmark. Its members are appointed by the Minister for Sciences and its tasks are to evaluate the quality of EVA's accreditation reports (by comparing them with reports of ACE) and to make the final decision. In addition, the

council is responsible for quality assurance of EVA's work, while financial control of EVA is carried out by the Ministry of Education. EVA is in constant contact with ACE, the accreditation body of the Ministry of Science, aiming at comparable criteria, procedures and standards whenever possible.

Besides several internal quality assurance measurements EVA gathers feedback from external partners and clients. EVA applies a quality management system, unlike EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) or ISO. In 2008, EVA reevaluated its quality assurance system and formulated a new framework for external feedback, which considers the diversity of projects, and adapts feedback methods and instruments to them.

3.1.3. Accreditation of VET providers

3.1.3.1. *Criteria for accreditation*

The criteria for accreditation were developed by EVA in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. There was a pilot phase involving training providers' associations, evaluation of which resulted in the current set of criteria. For accreditation of new training programmes and/or training provision there are seven criteria, for accreditation of existing training provision there are 17 criteria.

For new training programmes the quality of training content is contained in the criterion 'aim of learning outcome':

- aims for the training have to be strongly coherent with demand for the respective training programme;
- aims have to be described according to the (Danish) qualification framework;
- weighting and prioritisation of the training elements have to be coherent with the training's aim and have to be expressed in the European credit transfer system (ECTS);
- practice elements of the training have to be appropriate in comparison to the remaining elements of the training.

For approved training programmes which should be offered by a new training provider (new training provision), additionally, it has to be documented that there are sufficient practice places, that the necessary knowledge and professional setting for training provision is available and that the provider has implemented a systematic quality assurance system.

Criteria referring to customer satisfaction or learning outcome can only be applied to existing training programmes. Applicants have to provide different key tables, such as the rate of graduates that start in a relevant job or enter into

Table 6. **Criteria for accreditation in Denmark**

New training programme	Delivery of new training programmes	Delivery of existing training programmes
Relevance and demand	Need for training provision and contact with potential employers	Employment (key diagrams) (1)
		Based on employment and professional trends
Learning outcome	Practice places	Based on development in relation to employment or profession
		Contact with potential employers
Arrangement of training elements (2)	Arrangement of training elements	Learning outcome
		Assessment of learning outcome
	Knowledge basis (based on current knowledge)	Practice
		Content and arrangement
	Professional setting (3)	Based on development in relation to research knowledge
	Facilities and resources	Facilities and resources
		Systematic and continuing quality assurance
	Quality assurance	Quality assurance of practice
		Quality assurance of internationalisation
		Teaching staff (4)
		Prevention of drop-out
		Achievement of learning goals (final grades)
		Internationalisation

- (1) Graduates must be employed to a certain degree in a relevant job or participate in further education. The EVA defines together with the expert panel a minimum limit which has to be reached by the applying institution.
- (2) Appropriate requirements for access, adapted training elements in relation to the access giving training programmes, appropriate practice elements, the possibility for students to partly study abroad within the regular period of study.
- (3) This criterion refers to the existence of related relevant trainings (with respect to the content and the vocational field). If this is not the case a plan for the establishment of an appropriate milieu has to be submitted.
- (4) Quality of teaching staff refers to theoretical, technical, pedagogical as well as practical vocational knowledge.

further education, drop-out rates and final grades of students. Further, applicants have to reveal and explain internal and external evaluation activities, including evaluation by students and assessment of learning outcome through exams.

Systematic and continuing self-evaluation of VET providers is a criterion and an effective internal quality management system is a precondition for accreditation. The application specifications are well structured with criteria and indicators for internal quality management, so the application itself can be seen as a self-evaluation exercise.

3.1.3.2. *Process of accreditation*

There are detailed guidelines from EVA for the accreditation process at applicants' disposal. The guidelines contain the key elements, detailed descriptions of definitions, questions to be answered, guiding comments and the list of required documents and tables to be delivered. In the guidelines for accreditation of existing training programmes there is also a chapter on site visits. Applicants receive a letter describing the aim of the site visit, the planned process and the participants that are supposed to take part. The accreditation process for existing training provision consists of the following steps:

- information meeting for all applying institutions;
- the applying institution works out its application report including documentation and sends everything electronically to EVA;
- simultaneously EVA nominates an expert panel of three or four experts and informs the VET provider of its formation; the provider has the right to object. The expert panel has to cover three areas of knowledge and experience, namely the specific field of the labour market, the vocational field in question and pedagogical knowledge and experience. Experts get an introduction from EVA to the accreditation process;
- the expert panel and EVA study the application report and all additional material; if necessary, they will ask the applicant for additional information. It is EVA's role also to assure the consistency of evaluations between different expert panels;
- the expert panel and EVA visit the applying institution. Site visits include a tour of the institution with special consideration of the criterion 'facilities and resources'. A guideline is used for interviews with the directorate, students and teachers as well as persons responsible for practical training;
- EVA drafts an accreditation report based on the evaluation of the expert panel. The report contains an evaluation and explanatory statement on fulfilment of each criterion as well as an overall recommendation for the Accreditation Council for a positive, conditionally positive or rejected decision. The expert panel has to approve the report;

- the applicant gets the accreditation report with the opportunity to correct possible factual mistakes. The applicant also has the right to raise objections against the report;
- EVA finalises the accreditation report, sends it to the Accreditation Council and publishes it on its website;
- the Accreditation Council takes a decision on a positive, conditionally positive or rejected accreditation based on the accreditation report.

The accreditation process for new training programmes and new training provision is similar, but applying providers have to send their proposals first to the Ministry of Education, which decides if the programme is in line with political goals for the sector. The ministry also gives final approval after the decision of the Accreditation Council. For the first accreditation period enacted in autumn 2008, the ministry accepted the accreditation decision as a rule. Final approval is more a political controlling tool.

There is a publicly accessible website showing results of the ministry's screening. The reasons for positive or negative evaluation are not published, but given to the training provider only.

According to the law, the accreditation process should not take longer than three months and normally this is the case. To set up a new programme, however, it will take about 10 months until final approval by the government.

3.1.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

Of 30 applications for new educational programmes submitted in 2008, 20 were approved and 10 were rejected. Most applications for new training provision of existing programmes were approved, only a few were rejected.

There is no special quality label awarded to successful accredited institutions. Accreditation means governmental recognition and only accredited training programmes and training provision covered by the law are allowed. The provider is granted permission to provide the accredited training and trainees can be sure that the training provision corresponds to the quality standards required by law. Recommendations for improvement of quality are given only indirectly as part of the accreditation as weaknesses will be described in the accreditation report as an explanatory statement for refusal or conditional accreditation.

Since 2000, CVET providers are required to carry out comparable evaluations of all CVET programmes they provide. For this purpose, a national self-evaluation tool was developed ⁽⁵⁾, and now constitutes a compulsory element

⁽⁵⁾ For more information, see: www.viskvalitet.dk (in Danish; requires registration and login).

of the providers' quality strategies. The aim is to measure both participants' satisfaction and learning outcomes, and satisfaction of enterprises whose employees have participated in CVET modules. It is a flexible tool that offers the possibility of inserting optional questions at regional and local levels, to include other aspects of interest to parties such as providers and regional councils. The advantage of this system is that it is possible to establish quantitative aggregated data on quality in CVET at national level. The accreditation system is supplemented by further quality assurance tools ⁽⁶⁾.

3.1.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

Evaluation of the accreditation system in Denmark is difficult, as the system is still in its implementation phase and experiences are available only with accreditation of new educational programmes. The system was tested in a pilot phase, where the umbrella organisation of educational institutions was involved. Training providers that participated in the piloting were surveyed after the first cycle and most were satisfied with the process, and experts were positive, too. The process has been simplified and adapted in the sense of feasibility. In future, all applicants will have access to a central database with all labour market-related key tables necessary for the accreditation application, such as number of employees in a certain sector.

Most training providers are satisfied with the support instruments. Some found the criteria difficult to understand and were uncertain whether they fulfilled the criteria. After discussions with umbrella organisations of providers, the current system was reconfirmed. It was suggested also that training provider associations should publish examples of good and bad applications.

Deeper evaluation of the accreditation system to include all stakeholders is planned by EVA. From their point of view, an advantage of the current accreditation process is that it is very close to the training provided for students, whereas it seems a disadvantage that the institution itself with its organisational and management capacities is not directly included. For the future, the interviewed expert from EVA proposed to include the accreditation of the provider organisation.

In principle, results of accreditation are to be used for VET policy-making by the Ministry of Education, but at the moment it is still too early. From the

⁽⁶⁾ The web-based evaluation system (www.viskvalitet.dk) is compulsory for CVET providers. There is a network for benchmarking in Denmark called ESB (evaluation, cooperation, benchmarking), which was established in 2003. In autumn 2008 about 70 schools were members of the network. The mission of the ESB network is to help members develop and realise an evaluation culture both for individual institutions and among institutions. The ESB steering committee is composed of representatives from all types of educational institutions.

ministry's point of view the process is clear and transparent for applicants. There are fixed application deadlines and training programmes start with a clear time perspective after accreditation. It is easier to make use of ideas for new training provision as this leads to more rapid development of educational programmes. It is a general concern that training providers have to take quality assurance into consideration in their daily work, so this comes more into focus. It is also important that approval is based on an external evaluation; formerly, approval was merely the ministry's task. With the new accreditation process it is easier to decide on applications as, due to standardised requirements and criteria, all applications are evaluated in comparison.

According to the Ministry of Education, enlargement of accreditation is planned for training programmes of the Ministry of Defence, maritime training programmes of the Ministry of Labour, police training programmes and Danish training programmes abroad (such as in China). There is political interest to export Danish training programmes for foreign students. Danish enterprises already search for foreign personnel, but want to get Danish-educated staff. For accreditation abroad it is intended also to make use of other accreditation bodies than EVA.

Contrary to CVET where accreditation of existing programmes will start by 2012, for most IVET programmes accreditation has not been implemented and currently there is no evidence that there are plans to introduce accreditation for these programmes. Although all these IVET programmes have to be approved and considerable efforts have been made by the Danish government to implement quality assurance tools, local and sectoral stakeholders have the main influence on the planning, realisation and quality assurance of them and they are not so far accredited.

3.2. Germany

3.2.1. VET context

Three subsystems of VET can be distinguished in Germany. The dual system for IVET, where most training takes place in companies while theoretical education is conducted in vocational schools, is regulated by the Vocational Training Act (BBlG) and the Crafts and Trade Code (HwO). An additional nationwide regulation determines the occupational title, duration of training, occupational profile, framework curriculum and examination requirements and regulations. Enactment of training is monitored by the chambers and the same bodies conduct interim and final examinations according to nationwide

comparable standards. In parallel to this subsystem, there is a – comparatively less important – school-based vocational training system in place, which is run under the responsibility of the school authorities, operating according to Federal or State law. The third subsystem covers numerous prevocational education and training programmes, which do not lead to an officially recognised qualification, but may lead to school graduation or several legally recognised ‘qualification modules’ (Cedefop, Refernet, 2009b).

All these components of IVET are strongly steered by regulations at *Länder* level and for these parts of VET a single accreditation system is not in place. As already mentioned, the study concentrates on CVET, where again three subsystems can be identified (Moraal, 2007). The biggest part (with a share of nearly 48% of expenses) is in-company training, financed and organised widely by companies themselves. Another 40% of expenses in the CVET sector are borne by individuals themselves. The third subsystem covers active labour market policies where public expenses correspond to roughly 12% of the overall CVET market, and it is for those publicly-funded continuing training activities that a nationwide accreditation system exists since 2004, established with regulations on recognition and approval for further education and training – AZWV (*Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung – Weiterbildung* – AZWV (2004)). It is therefore this relatively small part of CVET that the study focused on.

The roots of this regulation date back to German reunification, when CVET in the eastern regions expanded enormously and – from an interview partner’s point of view – was used as a cure-all for social problems. A ‘CVET industry’ accrued, which exhausted substantial volumes of public money. Responding to this development in 1997, a catalogue for the appraisal of providers was issued with requirements for self-evaluation, monitoring, and output measurement. But it was only in line with reforms of ‘modern services in the labour market’ based on proposals made by the Hartz-Commission (Hartz et al., 2002), when providers were obliged to establish an internal quality assurance system. Further, AZWV was to bring more transparency to public-funded training and improve its quality, particularly in effectiveness and efficiency.

With the Hartz reforms a CVET candidate may receive from the local employment agency an education voucher specifying the training objectives and duration. The voucher is valid for three months and has to be used within the daily commuter area. Potential trainees choose a suitable training provider, which in turn charges the local employment agency for its services. But the services are only supported by the employment agency if and when the training provider and the respective training programme have been accredited.

3.2.2. Accreditation system: accreditation body and accreditation agencies

In Germany, a two-step accreditation system is in place, consisting of so-called certification and accreditation procedures. In the regulatory framework, external evaluation of VET providers and their training courses is called 'certification' and 'licensing', the bodies which are to exercise the licensing process are called 'certification agencies' (*Zertifizierungsstellen*) or 'centres of expertise' (*fachkundige Stellen*). To carry out their activities, these agencies or centres have to be 'accredited' first by the German Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit – the public employment service), which thus acts as the overall body for accreditation (*Anerkennungsstelle*) ⁽⁷⁾. The body assigns external experts as evaluators.

The accreditation body is supported by an advisory committee that gives recommendations for practical implementation of accreditation and certification. The advisory committee comprises nine members: one representative of the States, one of the trade unions and the employers' associations, one of the association of providers, one of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, one of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and three independent experts. The umbrella organisations of VET providers appoint their representatives following the principle of annual rotation.

Accreditation of agencies is based on evaluation of documents and through site visit verification. It is limited to three years. Accreditation can be applied for the entire federal territory, for a specific industrial or educational sector or for a certain region. Agencies from other Member States of the European Union have equal rights provided they have been accredited in an equivalent procedure.

This process of accreditation is precisely described in the 'Guidelines for the accreditation of centres of expertise' issued by the advisory committee. The guidelines contain the rules and procedural steps and are part of the QM handbook of the accreditation body. In their application, agencies have to document their internal organisational structure (legal form, organisational plan, total number of staff), their system of accreditation/certification to be applied (handbook on quality management, operating and working instructions, rules and requirements on approval, model contracts and sample certificate) ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ To promote understanding with other national systems, the term 'agencies' will be used from now on for the German 'certification agencies/centres of expertise'.

⁽⁸⁾ cf. Anerkennungsstelle der BA. *Leitfaden zur Anerkennung fachkundiger Stellen*. Version 05, 20.10.2009. Available from Internet: <http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/zentraler-Content/Vordrucke/A05-Beruf-Qualifizierung/Publikation/V-FKS-Antrag-Anerkennung-Leitfaden.pdf> [cited 16.11.2010].

As a major request, agencies must have a quality assurance system in operation. Required is a 'documented system in line with the standards of quality assurance and development' [AZWV § 2 (6)]. Since 1.1.2008, the standard DIN EN ISO/IEC 17021 has to be applied for accreditation and reaccreditation. Agencies are accredited, if:

- appropriate organisational structures are guaranteed and if the personnel and financial resources are available;
- the institution or appointed persons have the necessary expertise for evaluation of training providers and training programmes;
- they are independent and reliable; agencies should not be interconnected in financial, personnel or organisational terms with training providers they give advice to;
- they apply the recommendations of the advisory committee;
- they treat confidentially operating and business secrets that come to their knowledge;
- they have a recognised system of quality assurance and improvement in use;
- they have set up a complaints procedure.

Based on analysis of the submitted documents and a site visit, the evaluator of the accreditation body prepares an evaluation report. In addition, a 'veto-evaluation' takes place, meaning a further evaluation by an independent person. The final decision on accreditation is made by the head of the accreditation body. In the most optimal case, the accreditation procedure for agencies can be completed within two weeks. The centre of expertise receives notification of the accreditation and a certificate. The accreditation is audited annually by an on-the-spot audit. After three years an application for reauditing has to be submitted.

To date, at national level, 27 certification agencies have been accredited. There are large certifiers, operating nationwide, often accredited by the TGA⁽⁹⁾, that carry out accreditations according to various standards, and there are smaller facilities with varying profiles. They are all competitors in the market and 'cooperate only insofar as they are all interested in well-defined accreditation standards' (Sauter, 2006, p. 4). Information on accredited agencies is available on the website of the Federal Employment Agency⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽⁹⁾ Trägergemeinschaft für Akkreditierung – German Association for Accreditation.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See: <http://kursnet-findnen.arbeitsagentur.de/kurs/index.jsp> [cited 8.4.2011].

3.2.3. Accreditation of VET providers

Agencies for accreditation of VET providers act on behalf of the Federal Employment Agency and at the request of the provider, and they have to ascertain that the provider meets the defined quality standards. Providers can find information on the accreditation procedure and a list of certified agencies on the Internet. The provider decides by itself, which agency it would like to assign with its accreditation.

Agencies check if the provider (systems check) and its training programmes (programme check) fulfil the quality requirements. Upon request of the provider a selected reference proportionate to the total number of trainings offered by the provider is seen sufficient for the programme check. In this case the agency reviews the number of registered training programmes and places an offer for a random test (target: for less than 30 measures the sample should be 20% of total number, above 30 the root of the total number is extracted). Site visits to providers are mandatory, and where a training provider operates different local branches, the certification agency decides on a case-by-case basis about the scope of the audit in the different branches.

The advisory committee has specified the requirements for accreditation of VET providers in its recommendation of 13 March 2006. According to these recommendations, applications of VET providers for accreditation have to contain the following documents or information:

- a customer-oriented mission statement: the company profile, a definition of the 'customers', considering training participants as well as potential companies to employ participants;
- consideration and continuing integration of labour market trends for the design and implementation of training programmes: up-to-date analysis of customer-relevant segments of the labour market;
- definition of business objectives as well as teaching and learning objectives and their underlying methods including methods for evaluation of placement efforts: development of a mission statement, operationalised objectives for placement of participants; monitoring of quality policy and quality objectives, teaching and learning objectives;
- methods for fostering individual learning processes: methods for testing and identifying individual learning needs; use of appropriate teaching methods; tailoring measures to individual support in learning processes and instruments for their monitoring; measures for improving presence

- of participants, reduction of drop-out rates and achievement of training objectives;
- regular evaluation of training programmes through recognised methods: continuing monitoring of presence rates and drop-out rates of participants; monitoring of learning objectives, assurance of training quality, monitoring of placement rates; exploitation of evaluation results for continuous improvement of training design and implementation;
 - organisational structure and management: structural and procedural organisation, organigram, responsibilities, communication structures, monitoring and control mechanism (quality management, business process procedures);
 - implementation of internal company audits: system for continuing monitoring of indicators, achievement of objectives and processes through target performance comparison and internal audits – with special emphasis on customer satisfaction, teaching staff, facilities and technical equipment, contract conditions, management of personnel and training programmes, documentation of training programmes, management-review;
 - willingness to cooperate with external experts for quality development;
 - agreement on objectives, definition of the degree of attainment of objectives; management of improvements and change based on collected key data or indicators.

3.2.3.1. *Criteria for accreditation*

Accreditation criteria are based on DIN EN ISO standards as well as on the catalogue of requirements for training providers of the German Federal Employment Agency.

For providers, the following criteria are applicable:

- financial standing, professional competence and good reputation;
- consideration of the current situation and trends in the labour market and availability of support mechanisms for job placements of participants;
- suitability of managerial, advisory and teaching staff for implementation of successful training programmes;
- application of an internal quality assurance system.

For accreditation of training programmes the following requirements have to be fulfilled:

- a training concept tailor-made to requirements of potential participants;
- consideration of labour market-related and regional development trends;

- a concept which aims towards a high employment rate of participants;
- preparation of participants for a qualification (or qualification modules);
- a certificate stating the acquired qualification;
- expense ratios in line with principles of efficiency and cost-effectiveness;
- duration of training limited to the technically-required extent;
- integration of practical learning units into the training.

Definition of individual criteria

A central criterion is existence of a systematic approach to quality assurance and quality development. Through establishment and continuing use of quality management providers should ensure they work towards permanent quality assurance and improvement of their training programmes. The AZWV framework does not ask for establishment of a clearly-defined quality management system. On the contrary, at system level it is the intention to have competition between different quality management systems (QMS); however, it is stated that one of the fundamentals of a recognised quality assurance system is application of standardised and recognised methods, such as DIN EN ISO 9000, 9001:2000 for certification, the model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) or the 'Learner-oriented quality certification in continuing education (LQW)' ⁽¹¹⁾.

Other key indicators for providers are their economic seriousness as well as their technical and financial capability (financial standing). In this respect, qualifications and experience of managerial staff are considered essential elements for promising training programmes.

For all training programmes to be accredited, the provider has to prove that the training facilities and technical equipment are appropriate for realisation of the learning objectives.

On quality of teaching and learning, the following information has to be submitted: technical and pedagogical competences of advisors and teaching staff, their practical experience, their methodical-didactical competences, their experience in adult education, their advanced training and results of a survey of participants on the quality of teaching staff.

Providers must ensure labour market orientation of their training programmes. This means the provider has to demonstrate its cooperation with companies, professional associations and the local employment agency. Contacts with industry should help to arrange internships for participants.

⁽¹¹⁾ See p. 12 in: <http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/zentraler-Content/A05-Beruf-Qualifizierung/A052-Arbeitnehmer/Publikation/pdf/AZWV-Begruendung.pdf> [cited 15.2.2011].

The provider has to collect and analyse labour market-related data, determine targets for placement of participants and evaluate completed training programmes with focus on placement rates and job-related usability. A former placement target of 70% within six months after completion of training was cancelled; one of the reasons was to avoid creaming effects.

To get a training programme accredited, a training provider must prove its relevance to the labour market by providing data and documents on forecast demand, vacancies, current labour market surveys and detailed information on labour market demand.

VET providers must elaborate methods of placement support for their participants. Participants should be given the possibility to evaluate the training programme as well as its usefulness with regard to their job opportunities.

Agencies have to record the cost rates of approved training programmes and present them to the German Federal Employment Agency. The procedure comprises calculation of average cost rates based on presented data and is used to evaluate appropriateness. This information is kept confidential and will not be forwarded to providers.

3.2.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

The accreditation procedure for providers can be completed in a few weeks, especially if the provider has already been certified; certificates issued through a similar procedure and according to similar standards are taken into consideration. The decision on accreditation is made by the agency. The agency can give the applicant one chance to mitigate inconsistencies of set criteria or finally reject the application. Successful accreditation is called certification and leads to a quality certificate, which is valid for a maximum of three years. There are annual audits to prove the QM system is working effectively.

Among training providers, creation of an accreditation system led to considerable selection. There are currently about 3 500 providers for publicly-funded CVET accredited, whereas before the reform there were approximately 10 000 providers. Thus, the main results of the accreditation framework were clearing the market and contributing to better quality, since 'quick and dirty providers' were eliminated. Increasing competition among VET providers demonstrates the enormous importance of the certificate for market access. Providers use their certificates as a promotion instrument to attract new target groups ⁽¹²⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ For example, see: <http://www.sgd.de/fernstudium/staatliche-zulassung.php> [cited 17.11.2010].

Improvement in quality is also demonstrated by the fact that nationwide less than 8% of providers got certified without any objections. Representatives of training providers complain sometimes that different agencies use different scales for evaluations. In general the agencies are considered to have a high level of competence with regard to accreditation of VET providers. Some divergences have occurred, however, in evaluation of efficiency and cost-effectiveness of training programmes. Another indication of quality is provided by audits on labour market services conducted by the audit department of the German Federal Employment Agency. This department was established in 2007 and conducts sample tests to scrutinise the quality of training programmes. In 2008, of 255 audited programmes in CVET, 60 objected, roughly 24%. This objection rate is considerably low in comparison with other labour market services. The procedures for providing access to the programmes were criticised for not being sufficient or comprehensible enough and not complying with requirements.

Key objectives of the accreditation system are that as many participants as possible are placed in jobs, they pass examinations successfully, do not drop out and are satisfied with the training programme in general. From the perspective of public authorities accreditation is a guarantee of good quality and can, therefore, be considered an element of consumer protection.

Some experts stated that predominantly system-check-based accreditation leads to improvement and control of all processes contributing to success, but is not yet a guarantee of quality. Training providers' associations see no evidence of improvement of pedagogical quality – neither of the opposite. More expertise in pedagogy and labour market policy is demanded to foster pedagogical quality. A potential instrument to improve focus on learning services can be the ISO/DIS 29990:2010 'Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers'.

Results of accreditations are collected by certification agencies and forwarded to the accreditation body where they are analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Results are discussed in the advisory committee, twice a year, with participation of agencies.

3.2.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

With creation of the accreditation framework three objectives were set: strengthened competition, increased transparency, and better quality.

At agency level a form of competition was successfully introduced. According to the ministry it has proved that good quality CVET and accreditation can be realised without direct involvement of public authorities. For providers, too,

there is increased competition and allocation of budgets is easier for public authorities due to better control of costs and quality. At the same time, costs and efforts caused by the accreditation process have made the programmes more expensive; so a reduction of costs in CVET was probably not achieved. Due to the need to get accredited, the accreditation framework was termed a 'money generator' for agencies several interviews.

With regard to better transparency for customers and comparability of training programmes the result is less positive. Stiftung Warentest tested the quality management systems of CVET providers and came to the conclusion that 'transparency is not in sight' ⁽¹³⁾. It is difficult to compare systematically different training programmes, but the test considered it positive, that the customer at least can draw some conclusions concerning the quality of training and customer orientation of the provider.

The AZWV framework was to develop a quality concept for publicly-funded CVET, encompassing the obligation to establish a quality management system. DIN ISO standards were declared an integral part of the accreditation framework; process-oriented procedures broaden the perspective of the traditional input-oriented approach. In many aspects ISO standards are congruent with AZWV requirements; however, the AZWV framework goes beyond organisational processes and relates to labour market-related characteristics, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of training.

For providers without a quality management system in place, their structural and procedural organisation has probably improved. The mentioned test raised doubts, if quality management systems were implemented successfully, particularly because of the difficulty to measure the impact of a QMS (ibid.). Use of a quality management system is not a guarantee of good quality training, demanding training content, appropriate training methods, tailor-made to customers needs, with perfect service, outstanding learning materials, ideal learning environment and cooperative participants (ibid.).

It is seen as a particular strength of the AZWV quality framework that requirements go beyond standardised QM systems and that a professional competence with regard to CVET is required from auditors. And because requirements of the AZWV framework correspond to requirements of other recognised quality standards such as ISO or *Bildungsqualitätsmanagement* (BQM), German quality management in education, synergies in accreditation can be used.

⁽¹³⁾ Stiftung Warentest. Test.de (2008). Available from Internet: <http://www.test.de/themen/bildung-soziales/test/Qualitaetsmanagement-Transparenz-ist-nicht-in-Sicht-1531451-1531454/> [cited 15.2.2011].

Associations of training providers call for reduction of bureaucracy. Nevertheless, they appreciate that specific criteria are related to training and employment and they value positively the fact that those providers, already certified based on a different standard must prove fulfilment of pedagogical requirements. Others criticise that no QM standard has been determined; it is said that as a result, several ‘exotic products’ for quality management have been developed, especially designed for CVET but not internationally transferable.

Apart from this view, some interviewed persons expressed their hope that AZWV should become a more powerful instrument extended beyond the part of CVET, which is regulated through training vouchers.

In public debate the institutional setting of the accreditation system is criticised. Instead of assigning the Federal Employment Agency as the overall responsible accreditation body, it would have been better to assign an external authority with these tasks. Excluding public entities should have helped to avoid an oversized bureaucracy for accreditation in CVET (Roos, 2008, p. 179). It is assumed that a new federal law implementing the European Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2008a) on establishment of a legal framework for systematisation and harmonisation of accreditation in Europe will influence decision-making in the future and aim to establish one national accreditation agency in Germany.

3.3. France

3.3.1. VET context

After passing their lower secondary level of education, from age 11 to 15 in *collèges*, students in France can choose between different routes at upper secondary level: general, technological or vocational routes. Those three routes lead to different *baccalauréat* diplomas (A-level) all of them giving access to higher education. The general route is to prepare most students who obtain their general bac diploma to pursue university studies. The technological route is to prepare students for their technological *baccalauréat* diploma, and then pursue higher level technological courses in universities or technological colleges for shorter studies (generally two or three years). The vocational route is to prepare students to enter the labour market and leads to the following qualifications: certificate of professional aptitude (CAP), and the vocational *baccalauréat* diploma (*baccalauréat professionnel* or Bac pro

– A-level). ‘In recent years, some 37% of students in their final year of junior high school chose the vocational route ... – with 26.5% going on to vocational high school, 3.7% to agricultural high school and 6.7% into apprenticeship – while the others continued general (and technical) schooling.’ (Cedefop, 2008b, p. 29; Cedefop, Refernet, 2009c). The vocational *baccalauréat* gives access to higher education, like any *baccalauréat*. Some students indeed seek to obtain a *brevet de technicien supérieur* – two years after the *baccalauréat*. This route enables students to acquire qualifications, skills and know-how in a work-oriented environment of a vocational high school (*lycée professionnel*) or under the apprenticeship system.

Initial VET can take two forms in France:

- vocational education inside the school system, delivered in a vocational or agricultural high school (*lycée*) or a vocational training unit within a general and technological or a multipurpose (*lycée polyvalent*) high school;
- apprenticeship, during which the apprentice, who has a contract of employment with a company, is trained alternately in the workplace and in an apprentice training centre. Traditionally, it is the craft-based sectors that make most use of this form of training.

To provide continuing VET, namely to use the funding which is earmarked for it, training organisations need to register with the responsible government administration. Apart from this formal requirement, the market in training provision is open and competitive. There are more than 45 000 registered training organisations but only 7 500 of them offer training as their main activity (Cedefop, 2008b, p. 37). Private training bodies include non-profit-making associations, private profit-making enterprises and self-employed trainers. Public and semi-public training bodies comprise:

- establishments that report to the Ministry of Education: the GRETA (groups of establishments) and the National Centre for Distance Learning (CNED);
- bodies covered by other ministries such as the ministry in charge of higher education, the ministry in charge of health, the ministry in charge of agriculture with agricultural training centres, the ministry in charge of employment with the National Adult Vocational Training Organisation (AFPA);
- bodies linked to chambers of agriculture, commerce, industry and various trades.

All these bodies can train any of the groups requiring continuing VET: job-seekers, people in work, self-employed people and other individuals.

Developing stronger focus on quality is one of the major challenges for

the French vocational training system and various initiatives have been undertaken to introduce quality criteria to the VET system. At national level the Outline Financial Legislation Act (LOLF) of August 2001 introduced a culture of results, of spending more wisely and making public action more effective by drawing up performance indicators. In addition, several institutions compile statistics and conduct studies to evaluate the effectiveness of policies implemented. At regional level, some regional councils have adopted 'quality charters', which are cosigned by providers delivering vocational education and training. Each region establishes its own policy based on consultation with local stakeholders (social partners, State, territorial authorities), and draws up a vocational training development plan to coordinate various strands of VET provision.

At training provider level, several quality labels were introduced in France, with a view to certifying the quality of training organisations, both in initial and continuing training. For the scope of this study two quality approaches were selected, developed by the Ministry of National Education, one in initial VET and the other addressing continuing VET. For initial VET the label *Lycée des Métiers* (high school of trades) was chosen, while the 'GretaPlus' label stands for quality in CVET. Both schemes are voluntary and directed at accreditation of VET organisations, but for GretaPlus it is up to the institution to determine if all parts and programmes are covered or certain fields of training only.

3.3.2. IVET – *Lycée des Métiers* (LdM)

3.3.2.1. Context

Educational institutions being accredited as *lycée des métiers* (LdM) unite several types of VET: initial vocational training, apprentice training, adult continuing training and validation of previously acquired competences (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* – VAE). They prepare for vocational diplomas (CAP, *Baccalauréat professionnel*). The LdM is not a new type of high school; labelled institutions keep their initial legal status. LdM status can be obtained by vocational high schools and polyvalent high schools being of public nature or operating under contract with the Ministry of Education when being private. A high school providing technological or general education only cannot be accredited as LdM, unless it has signed a partnership with a vocational high school.

The LdM label qualifies high schools providing a peculiar range of vocational training and services adapted to the needs of regional markets.

Its key elements are to offer a coherent range of vocational training around a consistent group of jobs, to provide access for people with different status (pupils, apprentices, students, adults). Relevant VET providers also have to develop narrow relationships with local and regional employers and the world of business.

The framework for LdM was fixed in Articles D 335-1 to D 335-4 of the national code of education ⁽¹⁴⁾, where national compulsory criteria as well as the procedure of accreditation are defined.

3.3.2.2. *Accreditation system for IVET*

The LdM quality label, which is rather recent, identifies regional poles of excellence in vocational training and/or in provision of certain services related to placement into employment. Created in 2001 by an initiative of the Minister for Education to strengthen the identity of institutions providing vocational training, it was driven by four main objectives to:

- promote attractiveness of the vocational route in the educational sector;
- push the regional network of VET providers towards quality;
- reinforce synergies between the vocational and technological routes of training;
- restructure training provision for academies to make them more consistent.

Finally, the LdM initiative also aimed at promoting the pedagogical and educational quality of VET institutions allowing them to become essential tools for certification and professional integration of young people and adults in the perspective of lifelong learning.

Since its establishment in 2001, the LdM approach has seen several waves of development. In 2003, the need for individualised flexible pathways was stressed, the LdMs were encouraged to develop sustainable relationships and services with enterprises in their respective regions, and consequently the national criteria for accreditation were complemented by regional specificities.

In 2005, the number of criteria for accreditation as LdM was extended from four to nine and procedures for accreditation were fixed by law. In 2007, the Minister for Education started renewal of the vocational training sector and pushed the LdM approach as a lever for modernisation; a new target of 800 schools being accredited as LdMs by the end of 2010 was set.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See: <http://eduscol.education.fr/D0154/ref.htm> [cited 15.2.2011].

Although development of the LdM approach is a national priority, supported by the Minister for Education, participation in accreditation remains voluntary for VET providers. The process leading to accreditation as an LdM is directed by the rector of the academy, which is the administrative structure for governance of all educational institutions in a certain region. There are 30 academies in France, all led by a rector who is the representative of the national Ministry of Education.

3.3.2.3. Accreditation of IVET providers

It is the rector's office which is responsible for the LdM accreditation process. It encourages certain VET institutions in its academy to go for LdM accreditation and will launch a respective campaign. An accreditation team will receive candidatures and later will also be in charge of following the results and projects of accredited high schools. The accreditation process is carried out by an audit group, which will report to this team and then to the rector, who will confer the quality label to those institutions that have met the criteria. Thus, the label is given only to those VET institutions, which actively respond to a set of accreditation criteria defined at national level and specified at the level of each academy. The Ministry of Education, at national level, will publish the list of accredited high schools.

Criteria for accreditation

The national framework for LdM accreditation defines nine criteria to be met. If an institution cannot meet all the criteria alone, partnerships with other establishments can be made. The networking principle is highly valued in the whole framework. Four criteria for getting accredited as an LdM are envisaged by law.

1. The applying institution must offer a coherent range of vocational training programmes, constructed around a consistent group of jobs. These are jobs of the same professional sector (for example sales in different branches), qualifications related to one another (for example in environmental protection of landscape, water and sea) or supplementary (for example sales, service and maintenance of motor vehicles).
2. An LdM must provide a whole spectrum of vocational qualifications, starting from the first qualification level, the CAP, including the vocational *baccalauréat* and also higher education diplomas such as the *brevet de technicien supérieur*. This does not mean that all VET institutions applying for an LdM accreditation must provide higher education diplomas by themselves. Instead the rector of the academy is asked to link vocational

high schools to technological schools that could admit students who obtained their vocational *baccalauréat*.

3. Applying institutions should admit trainees of different status: pupils, adults in continuing training, apprentices, and students. Again, the different offerings can be assured by a network of institutions that complement one another with their training programmes.
4. A service for validation of previously acquired competences has to be provided. Every institution applying for LdM must have at least one staff person trained to give advice and support candidates asking for this kind of service.

Five additional criteria for LdM accreditation have been envisaged by ministerial decree.

5. Partnerships with territorial communities, the regional economy and institutions of higher education. These partnerships are a focus of the accreditation process.
6. Putting in place activities for teachers and trainees of the applying institution to increase orientation and learning conditions in VET. With other institutions in the territory, a strategy should be created for development of relevant tools and expertise.
7. Opening towards Europe or exchange with foreign countries. The international dimension of the applicant should be enforced, through working experiences abroad for trainees or exchange with foreign countries on cultural, linguistic and professional themes based on real mobility as well as by making use of the Internet, videoconferences and mail or meetings with professionals of foreign firms established in France.
8. Facilities for accommodation. This criterion does not mean that the applying institution inevitably should have a boarding school, but external solutions with other local establishments providing places for accommodation of trainees will do as well.
9. A service for support of trainees with placement into employment or public guidance after graduation from training should be established. Applicants should undertake research into the labour market and make contacts with regional enterprises, participate in placement surveys to verify and adapt offered training programmes according to demand.

Institutions not responding to all the criteria of national terms of reference can obtain the quality label by establishing partnerships with one or several other institutions in the territory fulfilling the complementary requirements.

The overall intention behind these nine criteria is to create an impact of quality on the image of the applying institution, to increase the quality of services for employers, employees and training participants, to improve quality of training and to support integration into employment.

Process of accreditation

Apart from the institutional framework, the process of accreditation is flexible. In general, rectors of academies will designate an academic staff member to monitor the file, but academies will choose different strategies for piloting the initiative, modalities of organisation, methods and tools they use, their strategies for monitoring and auditing and the kind of support they give to applying institutions.

To start the process, the rector sets up and chairs an academic LdM group consisting of representatives from territorial inspectorates and regional council, social partners, heads of VET institutions, teachers, trainers and parents of students. The academic group is charged with adaptation of national criteria for accreditation to the territorial and organisational conditions in the academy, with registration of candidates willing to participate in the accreditation process and with approval of these requests, thus supporting candidates to meet the criteria for accreditation. The academic group is also responsible for helping with implementation of the quality objectives in applying VET institutions and to evaluate their achievements together with pedagogical bodies. In its audit the group will scrutinise conformity to the framework of national accreditation criteria. The audit is also seen as a particular step towards improvement of quality and therefore has to address the main strengths and objectives for progress of the applying institution. The audit report is submitted to the rector, who finally will take the decision on allocation of the LdM label.

The rector transmits to the Minister for Education the list of VET institutions granted the LdM quality label. Then, the list of accredited LdM institutions is published in the official publication of the Ministry of Education (*Bulletin officiel de l'Éducation nationale*)⁽¹⁵⁾. The ministry is also responsible for monitoring the legitimacy of decisions on applications to become an LdM.

The LdM label is issued for five years and can be renewed after this period. In between, LdM-labelled VET institutions have to submit an annual progress report about their projects to improve the quality of their services. Those having difficulties in achieving their quality goals will get support from the academic group.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The list of accredited LdM institutions can be found at: <http://eduscol.education.fr/pid23571/liste-des-lycees-des-metiers.html> [cited 29.1.2011].

3.3.2.4. *Results and impacts of the accreditation system in IVET*

The LdM initiative started in 2001. In the first years the interest of VET institutions was rather modest but it gained momentum recently: 696 vocational or polyvalent high schools received the quality label '*lycée des métiers*' up to December 2009 ⁽¹⁶⁾, due to a campaign launched in 2007 by the Minister for Education to achieve the goal of 800 LdM by 2010 thus covering 50% of all VET high schools in France. While this quantitative target probably will be attained, some quality objectives will need some further consideration.

The LdM label is an important approach to create a dynamic towards quality and excellence in VET, develop new projects and partnerships and promote accountability against common criteria for quality. To become accredited as an LdM is an added value for promoting the VET institution among students and their parents and potential employers of trainees. By strengthening professional partnerships, the LdM approach works as a kind of passport to the world of business organisations and thus supports both adaptation of training content and integration of trainees into employment.

The particular objective of the LdM approach, namely to shape the professional identity of VET institutions has been achieved so far only by those providers offering very specialised training programmes in sectors like hospitality (hotels and restaurants), construction, or automotive industry. For other VET institutions, in particular polyvalent high schools, it is difficult to form a clear professional profile.

Industrial relations of an LdM in France

From an interview with Bernard Plasse, principal at the Lycée Maximilien Perret in Alfortville, Académie de Créteil:

'Our relationship with industry is somewhat unique. For instance, employers keep very close tabs on the students' progress, in particular through work placements. The young people are closely monitored and assessed in the work place and getting a job in the same company after completion of the placement is extremely crucial. Continuing professional development programmes involve more regular contact with employers and, as a matter of fact, one of our staff has specific responsibility for external relations and works with industry contacts on a day-to-day basis' (Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Education et de la Recherche, 2003).

Some institutions have been afraid of being restructured or merged with other providers, in particular those with limited experience of networking. In some cases the idea of becoming an LdM was not supported enough by teachers and trainers, who had difficulties to accept stronger links with the business world, the focus of the LdM approach. This might be due to the fact that training trainers is not an issue in the national criteria for accreditation.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid.

Still the LdM label is not well known enough, in particular in the world outside the educational system, whereas inside it is not sufficiently integrated into the practices of academies and VET institutions. A common logo for promotion of the LdM quality label is so far not available at national level, an indication that more active communication and marketing of the LdM approach is needed both internally and externally.

An analysis of experiences with LdM accreditation undertaken by the general inspectorate revealed that several team members of applying institutions were motivated to evaluate their practices and reflect on improvements. It seems, however, that these activities rarely are of continuing nature and that changes in relation to education and training remain at a minimum level. It is interesting to note, that the criteria for accreditation do not address quality of the learning process. Often the LdM quality label is seen as a formal objective that primarily is important from an administrative point of view without having remarkable consequences for provision of training. Nevertheless, because the quality label has to be renewed continuously, members of staff make a common effort to reach their targets and meet the criteria for accreditation to assure renewal of the quality label. Based on strong support from the academic group for establishment of projects, employees may become interested in attending another grade of quality with long-standing measurable effects.

The general inspectorate is charged with regular evaluation of general education and VET systems but so far no special report on the LdM and its particular impacts has been published ⁽¹⁷⁾. In future before going to more ambitious targets at national level, a detailed quantitative analysis of the impact of results achieved against certain criteria will be made.

3.3.2.5. *Evaluation of the accreditation system in IVET*

The LdM label is a renewable title according to a national framework of standards of excellence. Implementation is a means to modernise the vocational route in the education system, create flexible pathways and thus increase the system's permeability and improve the overall attractiveness of VET. It has promoted the idea of quality in VET and the concept of lifelong learning, and where implemented seriously, it helped reinforce the relationship between VET and the employment system. Impacts on the learning process of trainees may also occur via this link. This issue is not included in the list of national indicators for accreditation, nor is training of trainers.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid253/les-rapports.html> [cited 8.4.2011].

In contrast to other accreditation systems, the LdM approach includes representatives from internal and external bodies in the process. Nevertheless it is mainly an internal matter of the academy. Encouraged from the top of the institutional network, the rector of the academy and all stakeholders including representatives of the regions and professional bodies work towards the common objective to obtain the LdM quality label. There is strong support from the academic group to VET institutions interested in getting the quality label.

LdM accreditation is a flexible approach, adapted to regional preconditions and development needs of individual academies, and it is also a prospective approach for improvement of quality in the future. Award of the LdM label is not just a statement of the status quo of the relevant VET institution; it is also acknowledgement of efforts of the applicant towards improvement of quality in service provision. Although these efforts must correspond to criteria of the national framework, accreditation is based as well on individually defined activities (*projets*) with particular quality targets for each applying institution.

For the future, design of a coherent policy framework encouraging academies to implement a real quality strategy including measurement of its effects would be a step forward. It is envisaged to propose several quantified indicators at national level, which in combination with review of qualitative criteria should allow progress made in each LdM to be measured. Currently an extension of the LdM approach to other areas of VET is not on the agenda; priorities are instead to strengthen and improve the LdM approach by measuring its results and impacts.

3.3.3. CVET – GretaPlus

3.3.3.1. Context in CVET

A Greta (*groupement d'établissements* – group of establishments) is a structure that groups together public educational establishments that cooperate to provide continuing training. These establishments may be vocational high schools (*lycées professionnels*), general and technical high schools (*lycées*) or lower secondary schools (*collèges*). The number of Gretas in France amounts to 220 and with 5 600 training sites they are present in all regions. Their number per region varies depending on their size and number of inhabitants, for example, there are two in Corsica and 20 in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. In 2008, nearly 456 500 people, both business employees and job-seekers were trained in Gretas ⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For more information, see: <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid46986/l-essentiel-sur-les-greta.html> [cited 31.1.2011].

At regional level, every Greta decides the scheduling of training according to the needs expressed locally by businesses, local authorities and various government representatives. The Greta fulfils a public service assignment as regards CVET while ensuring that all training is self-funded by winning tenders both from public and private sources. Activity of Gretas in the regions is coordinated at ‘academy’ level by the delegate for continuing training (DAFCO), who is an advisor to the regional director of education, the rector.

At national level the Greta network is managed by the Ministry of Education and the role of the ministry is especially, to design in partnership with large companies harmonised training provision throughout the country, to coordinate their implementation, to animate the network and to encourage structural innovations. Depending on the type and size of company, the kind of training provision will come from one of the three levels of the Greta network: local, regional or national.

3.3.3.2. Accreditation system for CVET providers

The quality label GretaPlus is given to those public training organisations, Gretas that provide tailor-made training (*formations sur mesure*) in response to the needs and demands of their clients, these being business organisations or individuals. Behind the motivation to create the quality label GretaPlus was the intention to reform and adapt the structure of public training organisations to growing diversity of demands of customers and to the needs of an emerging market – and finally to assure a certain market share in CVET for State-funded institutions. To date, around 8 to 9% of continuing training provided in France is covered by the services of the national education system, organised in Gretas. Thus, Gretas are the biggest provider of CVET in France.

Multimedia information on GretaPlus

The following link allows access to a video, which demonstrates in some minutes the tailor-made (*sur mesure*) training provided by a Greta: <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid46988/un-referentiel-co-produit-avec-l-afnor.html> [cited 17.2.2011].

The accreditation system for GretaPlus was created by the department for continuing training of adults in the national Ministry of Education. It aims for high quality in the services of the organisation and particularly in the learning process of trainees. The quality label GretaPlus is given to Gretas having demonstrated that they conform to the standards of the national quality reference framework. This framework was elaborated by a group of training professionals with a strong reference to ISO 9000 standards,

but the GretaPlus framework is linked more closely to the peculiarities of learning in VET, including for example, validation of previously acquired competences and long-distance learning. When creating the framework it was another ambition to consider the objectives set at European level for the quality and effectiveness of VET systems. A draft framework was tested in 2000/01 in 12 academies and following its validation by a national piloting committee, the quality framework for the GretaPlus label was generalised and disseminated nationwide from 2002.

3.3.3.3. Accreditation of CVET providers

The quality label GretaPlus is given to Gretas having demonstrated that they fulfil the criteria as defined in the quality framework ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Criteria for accreditation

The Greta has to decide if the whole institution applies for the label or only certain parts of it (training in certain professional areas) only. In the last case, however, substantial parts of training activities must be included.

Altogether the new framework to obtain the GretaPlus label consists of two parts. The first is entitled service commitments towards clients and beneficiaries (*engagements vis-à-vis des clients et des bénéficiaires*) and includes 15 detailed commitments in seven areas. The second, called quality basics (*socle qualité*), consists of six provisions being necessary preconditions to guarantee the commitments towards clients and beneficiaries.

Process of accreditation

After having implemented an internal quality approach as defined by the criteria of the national framework, a Greta may announce its candidature to obtain the quality label GretaPlus to the Ministry of Education, given permission by the rector. Before submitting its application, a Greta normally should have one year of working experience with the national quality approach. Further, the applying Greta should have undertaken several self-evaluations, first with internal stakeholders in participating training institutions and second with support of auditors from the regional academy. Based on these evaluations and an interim audit report, the official demand to obtain the label is submitted to the ministry.

⁽¹⁹⁾ AFNOR. Référentiel de bonnes pratiques: Formation et prestations sur mesure pour adultes. Engagements de service. August 2009. Available from Internet: http://greta.ac-rouen.fr/IMG/pdf/Presentation_REFEFENTIEL_bonnes_pratiques_oct-2009.pdf [cited 17.2.2011].

After three months, the Greta will be evaluated by external auditors. These auditors belong to the national education system and are specially trained in auditing techniques on quality issues; they participate regularly in continuing training on this subject. The external auditing team is designated by the ministry in agreement with the rector of the relevant academy. The team includes specialists in quality assurance and pedagogy for adult training and they check conformity of the preconditions in the Greta with requirements of the national quality framework by analysing submitted documents and observations and interviews on the spot. The auditors make use of a specific support document with guidelines for the audit report. Their site visits last

Table 7. **Reference framework for GretaPlus**

1. Commitments towards clients and beneficiaries
Welcome/information/advice
1. We provide you with individualised information and advice.
2. We facilitate access to information.
Individualised planning
3. Building on the analysis of your demands, your terms of reference or your call for tenders we are proposing you a tailor-made response.
4. If necessary, we can deliver a range of different services; for example: validation of acquired experiences, socio-professional integration, and accompaniment of professional mobility.
5. For vocational training we propose the recognition of the most suitable certificates.
Tailor-made services
6. All our services are subject to a contract, which is signed with each beneficiary according to the terms of reference.
7. A personal mentor monitors and accompanies each beneficiary for the whole duration of the training programme.
8. Along the course of the training, we adapt the training methods, assistance, tools and rhythm of work to each beneficiary.
9. If necessary, we readjust the training programme along its implementation in agreement with the beneficiary.
10. The competences acquired in the training are formally assessed for each beneficiary.
Human resources
11. Our services are delivered by qualified and competent personnel.
Equipment, support and tools
12. Each beneficiary is provided with adapted material and updated resources.
13. We take care of the comfort of the beneficiaries.
Administrative and financial follow-up, traceability
14. We manage the administrative and financial details of our services in time and ensure its traceability.
Evaluation of training delivery
15. We evaluate our services and the achieved results with the objective of continuous improvement.

2. Quality basics

Piloting

16. The management determines and evolves the policy of the organisation.
17. The management arranges the modalities for the implementation and monitoring of its policy and its commitments.
18. The management evaluates its policy and the modalities of its implementation.
19. The management makes the necessary adjustments of its policies and the modalities of its implementation.

Anticipation/reaction/innovation

20. The organisation ensures the monitoring of socio-economic developments and research into innovation.
21. The organisation cultivates its know-how.

Source: AFNOR. *Référentiel de bonnes pratiques: Formation et prestations sur mesure pour adultes. Engagements de service*. August 2009. Available from Internet: http://greta.ac-rouen.fr/IMG/pdf/Presentation_REFEFENTIEL_bonnes_pratiques_oct-2009.pdf [cited 17.2.2011].

between one and a half and three days, and following the visit they submit their audit report to the national accreditation committee (comité national de labellisation). The audit report is to support the decision-making process of members of the committee but will also encourage the Greta, to set up an activity plan in response to its conclusions.

Having analysed the audit reports the national granting accreditation committee will make a final proposal to the Minister for Education on the quality label. The committee consists of representatives of relevant ministries, governmental agencies and members representing the national education system (inspectors, directors of training organisations, quality auditors). The overall task of the committee is to discuss and make proposals for adjustment of the quality framework and procedural changes. The committee can refuse the application for accreditation, ask for additional information or another audit, or give their positive recommendation to the minister, who takes the final decision. The list of Greta awarded the quality label GretaPlus is published in the official bulletin of national education via the Internet on the website of the Ministry of Education ⁽²⁰⁾.

The quality label is given for a period of three years but the regional academy has to undertake an internal audit report every year to monitor implementation of the quality objectives in the Greta. In particular, the report has to demonstrate how maintenance of the established quality management system is assured. Based on this report and a respective proposal of the rector of the academy,

⁽²⁰⁾ List of accredited Gretas: <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid47009/les-46-greta-gretaplus.html> [cited 17.2.2011].

the label will be confirmed annually by the minister. After three years a new application has to be submitted and a new audit will start according to the preceding procedure.

3.3.3.4. Results and impacts of GretaPlus

After being successfully accredited, currently 50 out of 220 Greta have obtained the quality label GretaPlus. Some Gretas have also chosen to go for a certificate according to ISO 9001:2000f.

For clients of training organisations, the GretaPlus label gives a guarantee of homogeneity and quality of services, although training is provided in a highly individualised manner. The trainee benefits systematically from personalised services:

- to start, an individualised training plan considers the needs, objectives and competences that have been already acquired;
- pedagogical methods are adapted to the individual preconditions and learning preferences of the trainee;
- the trainee is accompanied continuously along the learning process and whenever necessary, the individual training plan will be adjusted accordingly;
- assessment of learning outcomes is made in the most appropriate way.

Good practice example in France

Impacts of accreditation

The strongest effects occur internally, inside the Greta and the academy. The Greta du Calvados, awarded the GretaPlus label, is taken as an example. Based on strong commitment of the directorate, several committees and teams for animation and coordination of quality processes were established. The responsible officer for quality is a member of the directorate, and every fortnight the directorate meets as the quality team of the Greta to monitor progress on implementation of the quality approach. Additionally, a development team meets once a month to elaborate proposals for further action. Advisors on quality, hired as part of the regular staff, play a crucial role in creation of an improvement culture. They disseminate information, organise exchange of experiences in participative processes, animate teachers and trainers to improve their daily activities and make use of innovative tools. A robust evaluation culture was established in most of the accredited organisations, and continuing evaluation of achievements proved to be a useful tool to improve the quality of services.

The Greta du Calvados at Caen reported that the accreditation process had an enormous impact not only on the CVET part of the organisation but on other training organisations of the academy as well. A development plan with four priority axes was developed and a quality action plan put in place. The quality process contributed to improve the full range of services. Developmental work and communication are better structured, more goal-oriented and tackle issues related directly to quality. While in relation to the world of business, the label is of restricted value, the main impacts can be observed inside the institution. The accreditation procedure has helped to implement an orientation towards customer needs and overcome the culture of schooling (*culture scolaire*). As a spill over effect, the IVET parts of the academy, too, today use some of the quality tools implemented in the CVET part.

Given the positive impact of being a successfully accredited institution with a quality label, the CVET part of the Greta du Calvados decided to apply the concept of learning organisation (*organisation apprenante*) to boost the internal dynamics towards even better quality.

3.3.3.5. *Evaluation of the accreditation system in CVET*

Public training organisations that provide CVET operate in a free market and this makes a big difference to initial VET. With the GretaPlus label, Greta organisations as main providers of CVET aim to gain a competitive advantage within this market.

GretaPlus is a market-oriented but State-driven approach. Criteria of the framework are adapted particularly to CVET, the process of accreditation is mostly internal. Attributing the quality label to a Greta is considered as just one stage towards quality that aims to impel an internal dynamic of continuous improvement.

Compared to other quality approaches, GretaPlus criteria for accreditation put strong focus on quality of the services delivered to clients (fund providers and trainees), and tailor-made services are based on specific organisation and monitoring inside Gretas. Quality of pedagogical activities and the learning process are at the centre of the GretaPlus approach. The manual for obtaining the GretaPlus quality label is clearly focused on planning, implementation and evaluation of individualised training (*formation sur mesure*), and available quality tools are used widely inside training organisations.

Regarding internal effects, the added value of the quality label towards business organisations is comparatively limited, despite a marketing strategy for the label with films, publications and conferences being designed. Due to these activities, the approach is rather well known among regional and local authorities and other stakeholders in the education system, but information for outside market players still needs to be reinforced.

Recently, the Ministry of Education in cooperation with AFNOR (the French Association for Standardisation) worked on renovation of the GretaPlus approach and presentation of a sample of good practices promoting engagement towards fund providers and trainees in all kinds of services related to CVET. It is expected that legitimacy of the new approach will be increased by cooperation with AFNOR. The main intention is to restructure the national quality framework for CVET and strengthen its transversal character. Specific efforts were undertaken to reduce the number of requirements and criteria for accreditation, and to overcome QA jargon by simplifying the terminology related to quality and quality assurance in VET. Since October 2009, the old label framework was replaced with the quality label delivered according to the new framework (see Table 7). However, no decision has been taken up to now (July 2010) on an eventual change of the name of the label.

3.4. Hungary

3.4.1. VET context

Since Hungary extended compulsory education up to age 18, a considerable proportion of school-based vocational training belongs to public education. There are two types of vocational training schools: the vocational school (*szakiskola*) offers two years of (primarily) general and typically (depending on the qualification awarded) two or three years of VET to students aged 14 to 18/19; and the secondary vocational school (*szakközépiskola*) offers four years of (primarily) general, and an additional (and optional) one or more years of VET to students aged 14 to 19 (or older) (Cedefop, Refernet, 2009d).

The major difference between the two school types lays in their objectives and the qualifications they offer. Secondary vocational schools prepare students first for the maturity examination and award of the maturity certificate (ISCED 3A) that is a prerequisite for higher level studies. On achieving this award, students can choose to continue studies in VET grades (at post secondary level) or take the vocational examination and obtain vocational qualification at ISCED 4C level NQR (National Qualifications Register, NQR; the Hungarian abbreviation is OKJ). Students studying in vocational schools, however, can take only the vocational examination and without the maturity certificate they can attain only an ISCED 3C or 2C level NQR vocational qualification.

Although some NQR vocational qualifications are obtainable only within the formal school system, most are also offered within the framework of adult training (*felnőttképzés*) available to those who have already completed their compulsory school education. Such VET courses may be classified as IVET in case the participant has not obtained a vocational qualification in public or higher education.

The accreditation system addressed in this study is applied in the Hungarian adult training sector. Adult training is provided outside the school system for those who have already completed their compulsory schooling. Regarding the number of programmes, participants and the qualifications obtainable, VET programmes (IVET or CVET) dominate the sector of adult training in Hungary. Adult training programmes can be grouped as follows:

- IVET (when participants obtain their first NQR vocational qualification in adult training);
- CVET (leading to State-recognised or other vocational qualifications; in some sectors and occupations – such as public servants, medical doctors, auditors, etc. – CVET may even be compulsory and prescribed by legal regulations);

- training aimed at promoting employability of people (IVET or CVET depending on participants' prior qualifications and includes training, retraining or continuing training of the unemployed and others vulnerable to exclusion from labour market groups);
- supplementary training (general education aimed at obtaining the skills required to enter VET at a given level, career orientation and guidance, career-building, language, ICT, communication and other skills developing courses helping adults to perform their work at a higher level).

Such VET courses are provided by various types of providers like State-subsidised regional training centres, private training enterprises, non-profit organisations, employers, public and higher education institutions or State agencies active in adult training.

3.4.2. Accreditation system

By the mid-1990s, adult training (VET) provided outside the school system was characterised by a multicolour and multichannel institutional system; more than 800 institutions of different kinds and sizes providing training. It was in the interest of the State to assure that adult training funding from the central budget would reach the most suitable institutions. There was a need to establish a system, able to filter – based on quality assurance – this multicoloured scene of institutions and provide guarantees that training provision in the accredited institutions would be of better quality than in the others. According to the original idea there would have been no more than 40 to 100 adult training providers. However, today there are approximately 1 200 accredited adult training providers.

Act CI of 2001 on adult training, which came into effect on 1 January 2002, declared the importance of quality in adult training and defined the key quality elements guaranteeing high quality. Based on this act the adult training accreditation system was established in Hungary.

3.4.2.1. Quality framework

Definition of accreditation criteria and experiences of institutions working seriously with quality considered 30 VET schools which had piloted adapted versions of the EFQM Model and 50 adult training providers which had implemented an ISO 9000 standard based quality management system. Between 2000 and 2004, the nationwide Comenius 2000 quality improvement programme for school education provided a framework for quality assurance and improvement at school level. This programme was a huge innovation comprising about 23% (= 1 735) of all Hungarian public schools, with approximately 30% being vocational schools.

The current accreditation system is quality-centred. It requires strong quality management elements as a precondition for accreditation. The training provider must have in place a quality management system with the following main characteristics:

- total quality management-based approach;
- define a quality policy and document the quality strategy and quality objectives;
- implement the PDCA cycle, namely activities are planned, systematic, controlled, documented, evaluated and improved continually;
- regulate the management and decision-making processes (training and assessment, recognition of prior learning, customer service and handling of complaints, improvement of the main processes) and review them annually;
- have a self-evaluation system in place and conduct self-evaluation every year, and based on this, develop a training improvement plan;
- operate according to prescribed personal and material conditions necessary for training and adult training services;
- define measurable key performance indicators.

With effect of 1 January 2007 the consumer protection and quality focus of the system was further strengthened through elaboration of an annual training improvement plan based on results of the annual self-evaluation ⁽²¹⁾.

In early 2005, Hungary officially joined European cooperation on quality assurance of VET and at the same time expressed its commitment to implement the common quality assurance framework (CQAF). After evaluation of the current situation phase in 2007 a detailed concept was elaborated and served as the basis for a two-year (2009-10) comprehensive project aimed at developing and piloting an integrated approach to quality management in the Hungarian VET sector as a whole (comprising school-based VET, adult VET and higher level VET) in line with EQARF (European quality assurance reference framework, EQARF) involving approximately 1 000 VET providers ⁽²²⁾.

3.4.2.2. *Accreditation body*

The officially recognised accreditation body to enact accreditation of adult VET providers is the Adult Training Accreditation Body (ATAB; the Hungarian abbreviation is FAT). This independent professional body has the highest decision-

⁽²¹⁾ Act CI of 2001 on adult training (and its 2007 amendment).

⁽²²⁾ New Hungary development plan, social renewal operational programme. Available from Internet: http://www.nfu.hu/new_hungary_development_plan [cited 8.4.2011].

making power and the responsibility for carrying out the accreditation procedure, elaboration of the rules, procedures and criteria/requirements for accreditation and also for issuing the certificate of accreditation. Besides its decision-making function, ATAB also has responsibility for monitoring and supervising adult training activities of accredited institutions. Judicial supervision of ATAB's operation is exercised by the minister responsible for adult training. According to the law ⁽²³⁾, ATAB consists of not more than 15 members appointed by the minister responsible for adult training (currently the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment), for a period of three years. Representatives of social partners' organisations (economic chambers, employers and employees) are official members of ATAB and play an important role in operating the accreditation system. ATAB involves experts both in accreditation procedures and monitoring/supervision activities. These experts go through a strict selection procedure stipulated by a specific decree ⁽²⁴⁾.

ATAB also operates professional committees consisting of three to five persons from among its members. The main tasks of these professional committees consist of examining the experts' report, giving opinions, making proposals to ATAB for adoption or refusal of applications for accreditation and preparing the decision-making on the application.

The accreditation body does not have an internal quality management system in operation. (The National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education – NIVE), within which the ATAB operates, has its own certified ISO 9001 based quality management system.) However, ATAB has established and applies many quality management related elements in its own work and operation (documented internal regulatory procedures, well-elaborated forms, evaluation criteria of applications, questionnaire-based survey on institutions' satisfaction with the work of accreditation experts, system of legal remedies, publication of rules of operation and of decisions taken, etc.).

3.4.3. Accreditation of VET providers

The adult training accreditation system – which is strongly based on quality management principles – has been in operation since 2002. It is a voluntary procedure regulated by law ⁽²⁵⁾ and covers both training providers and

⁽²³⁾ Act CI of 2001 on adult training.

⁽²⁴⁾ Ministerial Decree 10/2003. (VII. 31.) on the regulation of expert activity in the professional fields of operation of the Ministry of Employment.

⁽²⁵⁾ Act CI of 2001 on adult training (and its 2003 and 2007 amendments).
Government Decree 22/2004 (II.16.) on the rules of accreditation of adult training providers and adult training programmes (and its 2007 amendment).
Ministerial Decree 24/2004 (VI.22.) – issued by the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment – on the detailed rules of the accreditation procedure and accreditation criteria (and its 2007 amendment).

training programmes. Accreditation of providers means investigation into the training activity (development of curricula, teaching/training, evaluation) and related services, the level of control of the institution's management and decision-making processes, and their verification of quality. Accreditation of training programmes means: (a) investigation of their 'fitness for purpose' (if the particular training programme meets the objectives of the training, with special regard to labour market requirements and to raising the quality of life); (b) evaluation of their compliance with quality-related content and pedagogical requirements; (c) their verification ⁽²⁶⁾.

The objective of accreditation of providers is twofold. First, it guarantees to those participating in adult training the high(er) quality of the provision through the controlled framework of the training activity. Second, it makes transparent how the State subsidy is utilised by the institutions (purposes, effectiveness). The objective of accreditation of a training programme is to certify that a particular programme meets both the training objectives and pedagogical requirements.

Since 1 January 2003, accredited VET institutions are entitled to have access to national sources supporting adult training and since 1 January 2007 to any EU financial grant. This means that accreditation is a must for receiving any State subsidy and/or EU support for adult training purposes.

3.4.3.1. *Accreditation criteria*

For adult training providers, accreditation is voluntary but registration is obligatory. Introducing a registration scheme for institutions engaged in adult training activities ⁽²⁷⁾ was a big step in identifying the players of the adult training market and important from the point of view of financing (providing State support) and also control. The registry is publicly available and updated monthly on the website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Entering the registry of institutions does not mean acknowledgement and recognition of an institution's activity from a professional point of view. Accreditation criteria are additional criteria serving as a mechanism for assuring quality and as such making accreditation an increasingly attractive market(ing) asset as well.

As a precondition for accreditation the institution-applicant has to have (a) a quality policy, (b) a quality management system, (c) quality objectives and (d) a self-evaluation system in place ⁽²⁸⁾:

⁽²⁶⁾ Definitions based on the Act CI of 2001 on adult training.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ministerial Decree 48/2001 (XII. 29.) issued by the Minister for Education on the detailed rules of entering the registry of institutions of adult training.

⁽²⁸⁾ Ministerial Decree 24/2004 (VI.22.) – issued by the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment – on the detailed rules of the accreditation procedure and the accreditation criteria (and its 2007 amendment).

- (a) the quality policy should be in line with the objectives of training, operation principles, organisational culture of the institution, define how the institution meets the demands of its partners (students, employers, employers and tutors), should express the institution's commitment to fulfil professional and legal requirements, and improve the efficiency of its professional work continuously. There are some specific accreditation criteria in relation to the qualification and further (in-service) training of teaching staff. A human resource plan must present the composition of the training staff (teachers, tutors, trainers, instructors, mentors, etc.) including their qualifications, experience, professionals trainers and adult training, foreign language knowledge, etc.;
- (b) the quality management system should define, among others:
- the processes, that meet the expectations of those participating in training and are necessary to achieve the results in line with the quality policy, and their interrelations;
 - activities as well as the methods and tools, which guarantee continuous improvement of both processes and the organisation;
 - the fields in which information should be gathered and feedback received (such as content, material conditions, methods of training, teachers' work, methods of organisation, fulfilment of requirements by participants) to measure satisfaction of participants with training and its continuous improvement;
 - the procedure of communication, keeping contact (forms, regularity) with partners;
 - the person responsible for the operation and improvement of the quality management system.

The institution also has the obligation to regulate and describe the processes affecting significantly the quality of training, such as organisation and provision of training, assessment of the trainees' knowledge, recognition of prior learning, customer services and handling of complaints. No certification of the quality management system is required;

- (c) the quality objectives should be defined for a given year and comprise all relevant functions as well as all organisational units and persons involved in organising training; they should be measurable, suitable for an objective evaluation and include success criteria;
- (d) a description of the self-evaluation system and submission of a self-evaluation report are preconditions for accreditation. The self-evaluation system should provide an opportunity for evaluation of the institution-wide operation annually. The self-evaluation process should cover the characteristic features as defined in the EFQM model, the five

enablers of the organisation and the five areas covering the different results achieved.

Institutions should design and describe their self-evaluation systems (aims, areas, content, process, methods, and conditions, etc., of self-evaluation) on their own; there is no specific quality management standard to be applied. Relevant legislation does not give any instructions in this respect, except defining the nine main areas of evaluation. This means that institutions are free to choose the methodology of self-evaluation, which sometimes creates difficulties for them.

Besides these criteria and as a further precondition for accreditation, applying institutions should:

- have an accredited training programme already implemented (at least once);
- have a human resource plan for selection and (in-service) training of trainers;
- have a training improvement plan based on results of the annual self-evaluation;
- provide at least two different kinds of services related to adult training (one– prior learning assessment – is compulsory, the other optional);
- provide all necessary personal and material conditions for providing training and services related to adult training;
- plan, improve and evaluate its activities (implement the PDCA cycle);
- define measurable objectives and success criteria.

On the NIVE/ATAB website there are guidelines to help institutions to prepare their applications for institutional (and/or programme) accreditation. This material aims to help organisations establish their internal quality management systems by interpreting and understanding the accreditation criteria including those which relate to establishment of a quality management system and self-evaluation system.

3.4.3.2. *Process of accreditation*

Accreditation is a State administration procedure. The main steps of the accreditation process for VET institutions providing adult training are:

- registration of applications for accreditation, checking the formal requirements and completion of documents if necessary;
- appointment of experts, approval by the chairperson of ATAB;
- invitation of experts (usually two per application) and individual document-based evaluation by the two experts followed by a consensus meeting;

- site visit: the senior expert will contact the institution and agree details of the site visit. The duration of a site visit is approximately five hours on average. In more than 89% of institutions the site visit lasts for more than three hours;
- recording findings of the site visit by the experts (based on a standardised form and content elements), writing and submitting the report to the ATAB secretariat by the experts;
- session of the ATAB professional committee: examination of the report and making a proposal to ATAB for adoption or refusal of the application for accreditation, preparing decision-making on the application;
- ATAB taking the final decision on awarding or not awarding accreditation to the applicant: formulating the resolution as the result of the ATAB decision-making process (approval, refusal, request for completion of documents, etc.);
- updating publicly available information on the results of accreditation on the NIVE/ATAB website in a database of accredited institutions (*Akkreditált intézmények*) and accredited programmes (*Akkreditált programok*);
- payment of expert fees and honoraria to members of ATAB;
- uploading documents to the experts' website and the ATAB website.

Relevant legislation ⁽²⁹⁾ provides 60 days for the entire accreditation process and this deadline is kept in practice, too. Further certain other deadlines for individual steps of the procedure are defined by legislation.

When ATAB gives a positive decision of ATAB on the application for accreditation, an accreditation certificate is awarded to the provider for four years. Where negative, the applicant will get feedback with a detailed explanation on what was wrong and what should be improved. An appeal against the decision of ATAB may be submitted to the minister.

Following accreditation a monitoring process takes place, which aims to investigate whether the institution is able to meet accreditation criteria continuously basis. Since 2006, 200 monitoring visits are carried out per year and in 2009 only 100 were financed by the MPA fund (labour market fund). The monitoring professional committee of ATAB defines the institutions where monitoring visits should take place (for example, providers who had just slipped through the accreditation procedure, who had many documents to complete) and the criteria for monitoring.

⁽²⁹⁾ Act CI of 2001 on adult training.

3.4.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

In 2008, 499 applications for institutional accreditations (and 2 230 applications for programme accreditation) were submitted to ATAB of which 335 were awarded (67%), nine refused and 23 withdrawn. Requests for completion of application documentation for accreditation were addressed to 89 cases (18%). In 2008, there were 36 appeals submitted to ATAB. On 31 December 2008 there were 1 378 accredited institutions and 4 099 accredited programmes in the registry maintained by ATAB ⁽³⁰⁾.

Around one quarter of adult training providers have so far applied for accreditation, undergoing an expensive procedure with highly demanding and strict rules and criteria. Around 1 200 institutions have been accredited and are able to meet high quality requirements leading to better provision of training. They all have defined their quality policy, annual quality objectives/targets, have a quality management system, evaluate the training provision process continuously, and they conduct self-evaluation every year and – based on results of this self-evaluation exercise – elaborate and implement an improvement plan.

There is substantial evidence that adult training provision benefited considerably from the current accreditation system: it introduced a procedure in which the State validates the quality of training provision, and encourages institutions to deliver training courses of high professional level in line with the new NQF by law. The ISO 9000-based organisation of work and processes forced institutions to operate more systematically and maturely. Finally, the accreditation system requires fulfilment of the main preconditions for producing good quality, such as high qualifications of teachers and trainers, good infrastructure and thorough planning.

Besides all the above, accreditation increased transparency of the operation of institutions by introducing a consistent supervision and monitoring scheme (having a possible indirect market clearing effect) and application of compulsory quality management elements. It is also cost-saving as it does not require a certified quality management system according to ISO or other certification systems.

For providers, obtaining accreditation is a precondition for getting access to public funds (both national and EU). In the long term non-accredited organisations will not be able to remain in the training market. However, and this is important, many providers have spontaneously recognised the importance of quality and quality improvement and this internal 'driving force'

⁽³⁰⁾ Based on the ATAB 2008 annual report.

makes them apply for accreditation. Consistent and systematic use of many different quality-oriented elements of the accreditation system contributes to improvement of quality in these institutions, in the shorter or longer term. Thus, for providers accreditation can be considered a management tool, which makes fulfilment of the tasks easier and more efficient.

Institutional accreditation makes providers comparable with one another both from the entire operation and the training programmes offered perspectives. This provides also considerable help to participants in adult training and to those funding training activities – such as State/public organisations (municipalities, labour organisations), economic organisations and individuals – to make their choice according to their priorities.

For trainees, accreditation guarantees a certain quality in training provision. The rights of consumers are protected, as a complaints procedure is in place. One of the accreditation criteria is to survey the satisfaction of training participants, which means trainees have the opportunity to express their opinions on different aspects of training provision. They can also check if an offered training programme contains compulsory elements and is transparent concerning examinations, contracts and fees.

Results of accreditation are decisively used in creating legislation, and in formulating and defining monitoring/supervision criteria. Every half year ATAB – as stipulated by law – makes a report to the minister responsible for VET and adult training about operation of the accreditation system and results of monitoring. Based on experiences gained, ATAB can indicate deficiencies in regulations, and signal the issues, not in harmony with training practice and the needs of those participating in training. Therefore recommendations and proposals put forward by ATAB and its members serve development of a new VET system aiming at better employability (acquiring marketable knowledge and skills).

ATAB summarises the findings, experiences, and feedback received from professional forums and experts on operation of the accreditation system and sends this information to the ministry regularly. This feedback will be used by the ministry when revising the relevant legislation which actually leads to continuous improvement of the accreditation system (process and criteria).

The Association of Adult Training Providers (Felnőttképzők Szövetsége – FVSZ) is the main professional partner of the ministry. They take part in the process of framing legislation, and they also initiate modifications, alterations in the accreditation procedure and criteria, partly based on the initiatives and experiences of providers.

Employees' and employers' organisations as well as chambers are represented in ATAB, and they play an important role in the accreditation system, such as when defining the criteria and procedures for accreditation. They take part in legislative work, in defining particular accreditation procedures; in development and continuous improvement of the system. They can express their opinions on the accreditation procedure/process, accreditation criteria and monitoring/supervision of accredited adult training providers.

3.4.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

An empirical study was conducted in spring 2007 when elaborating the concept paper on implementation of CQAF. The questionnaire-based survey evaluated the Hungarian accreditation system among 200 accredited providers with a response rate of 52%. In summary, institutions have a positive attitude and strong commitment to high quality operation and training provision.

The main problems mentioned by institutions were: design/development and operation of the quality management system; understanding the criteria related to the quality management system; linking the quality management system with daily practice of the institution; identification and control of key processes; elaboration and implementation of the self-evaluation system (as relevant legislation does not give any advice, instruction or guidelines regarding self-evaluation methods). Only a few institutions have a well-thought and well-established, structured indicator system ⁽³¹⁾.

The accreditation system is a mixture of different quality management approaches: it has taken over from the ISO 9000 standard series the requirement for process control and also covers criteria of the latest ISO 9001 standard. Requirements of the system, however, go significantly beyond the ISO 9000 requirements, as they promote not only the process but also evaluation of the organisation's operation and its professional work by conducting self-evaluation and by focusing on demands and satisfaction of customers/partners belonging to the institution's environment. All these result in continuous improvement and development of the organisational culture of the institution, which is a total quality management and EFQM excellence model-based approach. Certification is not a prerequisite for accreditation, but the ISO 9001 standard and the EFQM excellence model are frequently used as additional quality tools by adult training providers.

⁽³¹⁾ Concept paper defining the conditions and tasks of implementing CQAF in the Hungarian adult training sector, by exploiting the funds of the national development plan (NDP) Phase II, 2007 (unpublished).

Accreditation criteria are framework criteria. This means that institutions applying these criteria have to fill them up with content themselves, and this presumes the presence of a mature organisational (quality) culture. On the one hand, this can be an advantage as in such a way they provide for institutional and professional autonomy and creativity. On the other hand, this might cause problems, in a self-evaluation system where accreditation criteria give only the nine evaluation areas without mentioning their content, the methods to be used, the feedback system to be applied and the indicators to be measured. Data on the effectiveness of previous training activities in terms of labour market effects are not used at the moment as a criterion for accreditation, but development of a sectoral tracking system is under way as part of implementation of the relevant ministerial order. However, in the frame of the self-evaluation exercise, certain institutions also carry out follow-up activities – surveying employers about utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace and the satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with the acquired skills and competences.

In terms of the quality of learning outcome as an increasingly important accreditation criterion the process of (programme) accreditation itself ensures the learning outcome is controlled as this asks for specification among others of used pedagogical methods, acquired knowledge, skills and competences, conditions of quality management of the programme (evaluation of learners' satisfaction, description of the methods for collecting information concerning completion and effectiveness of training, feedback management and the way they are used). On the other hand, the new (2007) module-based NQR and related professional/vocational and examination requirements (the Hungarian abbreviation is SZVK) uniformly regulate structure, content and qualification requirements (learning outcomes) both of initial vocational education (IVET) and adult training. The vocational and examination requirements of each NQR qualification define:

- access requirements (the required competences, a school graduation or vocational certificate, medical or vocational/career aptitude requirements);
- maximum duration of the training programme (number of vocational grades);
- balance of time devoted to vocational theory and to practical work;
- vocational/professional (learning outcome) requirements (in the case of qualifications of the new NQR, the professional competence modules specifying the task profile and related professional, methodological, social and personal competences);

- preconditions, parts and content of the vocational examination (in the case of qualifications of the new NQR, the examination requirements modules specifying the characteristics of the vocational examination).

From the above, it can be concluded that training courses recorded in the NQR are definitely outcome-driven.

The accreditation system contributed to changing the attitude and mind of adult training providers. Prestige of accreditation has grown considerably, more and more providers mention prestige among the reasons for applying for accreditation. More and more providers are interested in obtaining accreditation because they recognise the importance of quality and the opportunities provided by quality improvement. Once 'external' quality criteria are implemented in practice they tend to become an 'internal need'.

In summary, the quality of adult training provision benefited a lot from operation of the current accreditation system. The accreditation system:

- introduced a procedure in which the State validates the quality of training provision;
- encourages institutions by legislation to deliver training courses at a higher professional level;
- made the operation of adult training providers transparent, controllable and accountable;
- established guarantees for those participating in training by improving and enforcing consumer protection;
- introduced a consistent supervisory and monitoring scheme of institutions – adult training providers.

The main elements of the current Hungarian approach to accreditation of adult training providers can be summarised as follows:

- accreditation is a voluntary procedure, based on a strong and coherent legislative framework that considers the special features of the Hungarian education/adult training sector;
- it provides clearly-defined procedures, requirements and criteria and contains high level core quality criteria and many quality-related elements for improving quality of both institutions and training programme(s);
- the accreditation system contains and combines elements of internationally-recognised quality approaches like EFQM and ISO 9000 standards;
- it is partner-focused since institutions regularly survey and try to meet the needs and expectations of their partners with growing efficiency.

Despite progress made, there are still some areas for improvement of the current accreditation approach. Professional communication, dissemination and discussion of results and experiences is not systematic and wide enough. Information on the advantages of accreditation is not sufficient: most who participate in training are not aware of what accreditation means and what benefits it can bring.

To raise awareness of all those concerned (institutions - adult training providers, those participating in training, wider society, etc.), mechanisms and forums for transferring experiences, promoting benchmarking and common learning, for dissemination of results should be developed and implemented.

During site visits (both in accreditation and monitoring procedures) more attention should be paid to investigation of content-related issues, such as visiting classrooms, observing the professional methods applied by trainers. These are important when evaluating quality of adult training provision of a provider. For example, for monitoring, there is a one-day site visit but it is rather a paper-based inspection (checking training documentation) than an investigation of the substantive issues/items such as content, quality management and quality improvement. Monitoring should be more supportive.

Despite the partner-focused approach, there is still a lack of systematic feedback and review mechanism at system level, gathering information and experience on operation of the national system. It seems advisable to collect and evaluate experiences gained from operation of the accreditation and monitoring system, and take necessary improvement action.

Despite everything being written down in legal documents, it is quite difficult for institutions to understand what they are about. It is difficult to find out, for example, what should be written in the application document, in what format and detail. Many adult training providers are not familiar with or trained in the methodology of self-evaluation and process management, in using quality, evaluation and feedback techniques in practice, so they have difficulties in implementing the quality criteria.

Challenges for improvement ahead also include implementation of the European quality assurance reference framework and – as part of this – reviewing the Hungarian accreditation system and criteria against the EQARF. There is a need to fine-tune the current system, to make accreditation criteria more precise, concrete and straightforward, as it is difficult to implement them in their present shape. It should also be considered to define less but more strict criteria and conditions, decrease the formal and administrative requirements and cut down expenses related to accreditation. However, care should be taken that high quality criteria should not be diluted and adjusted to providers not able to meet them (such as private entrepreneurs).

There is a need to define common indicators for measuring efficiency and efficacy of adult training provision, and to use them systematically. Adult training providers should get used to an independent organisation making a judgement on their activity and performance, based on objective data.

Finally, it seems adequate in a European perspective to gather international experience and get acquainted with accreditation systems applied in other countries.

3.5. Italy

3.5.1. VET context

The national training system in Italy has a dual character: after the lower secondary school students can decide to attend State vocational schools or vocational training provided by the 21 regions (Cedefop, Refernet, 2009e). For the former, school-based VET, no accreditation is necessary, while for the latter the VET provider must be accredited to deliver training and provide participants with a certificate issued by the regional authorities.

This case study provides a review of the accreditation system in Italy, focusing on application and development of the system in the Lombardy region and in particular the ranking system put in place for evaluation of the performance of regional VET providers.

The Lombardy region created its accreditation system based on Law 166 of 2001 issued by the Ministry of Labour. This ministerial decree supports 'accreditation of training centres and orientation centres' by defining the sectors, addressees, corresponding subjects, typologies, structure, procedures, duration and validity, standards of professional competences of staff and by giving indications for experimentation with the operating model of accreditation.

In an agreement dated 1 September 2002 reached in the permanent conference for dialogue between the State and the (autonomous) regions on accreditation of training centres (both for initial and continuing training), the State gave autonomy to the regions to create their own accreditation models and use it according to a set of identified criteria. According to another decree of 2003 on occupational issues and the labour market, the regions must compose appropriate lists of accredited centres that operate in their own territory.

3.5.2. Accreditation system

The Lombardy region combined implementation of an accreditation system with innovation and restructuring of its previous VET system. The accreditation system opened the market to new players, giving them access to public funds and to

participate in activities planned and authorised by the public administration on condition that they meet quality standards set for accreditation. 'Accreditation is without doubt one of the essential elements of the more general process of *ex ante* control of training provision, which allows all regulatory bodies, in a specific region, to identify the players more suited to implement various training actions' ⁽³²⁾.

The system of accreditation of training providers in the Lombardy region, is characterised by several phases of development, and transition from one phase to the next was primarily characterised by fine-tuning the reference framework designed at the central regional level: changes were made mainly to raise the level of requirements needed for VET providers to be accredited, to improve continuously the system.

The first phase, which started in February 2002, focused on the need to concentrate accreditation on control of the processes and it was decided to use quality certification ISO 9000-2001 for all accredited sites. It was the first time that a system consisting of equal rules for all was implemented by the interested institution with support from the competent authorities.

The second phase, launched in May 2003, followed the pilot phase and was characterised by greater selectivity of the system, better management of requirements, and thresholds for indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, greater flexibility and simplification of the whole system. This phase moved attention towards quality of performance of accredited bodies.

The third phase, which started in December 2004, is characterised by reinforcement of structural and logistical requirements and professional competences able to ensure that accreditation constitutes the appropriate means for selecting organisations providing training and orientation services. Raising of the thresholds for requirements related to structural, organisational and human resource aspects aimed at encouraging creation of a stable and solid training system.

In the next stage significant reduction of accredited operational sites was noticed. Raising the level of requirements undoubtedly produced a selection effect. It allowed to verify the existence of requirements and their correspondence to statements included in the application for accreditation of VET providers. The 'tuning' period lasted for almost a year and was considered adequate time to allow providers to take necessary action fully to respect the legislation ⁽³³⁾.

⁽³²⁾ See: Evoluzione dell'accREDITamento Lombardo. Regione Lombardia, <http://www.buoneprassilombardia.it/index.php?pg=30> [cited 17.2 2011].

⁽³³⁾ See *ibid.* for more details.

3.5.2.1. *Accreditation bodies*

The regions are in charge of accreditation of VET providers. On responsibility for accreditation, Law No 166 of 25 May 2001 states that:

- (a) the regions are responsible for procedures for accreditation of services offered and/or planned in their territory;
- (b) the competent administrations may also use external resources to carry out investigations, auditing at the site and related checks, provided they safeguard their independence and objectivity towards the bodies to be accredited and respect transparency and free competition).

Only the regions can accredit and deliver regional certificates for training to trainees upon completion of a given training programme. The regions are legally responsible for their expenditure and undergo regular auditing by the State and the European Court of Auditors.

3.5.2.2. *Accreditation criteria*

The master pattern of accreditation criteria is produced at national level by ISFOL⁽³⁴⁾ in cooperation with social partner organisations. In the new agreement between the State and the regions, published in the Official Government Journal No 18 of 23 January 2009, ISFOL presented new accreditation 'policy lines' (*Linee di indirizzo*) which in the future will be interpreted and implemented by the regions. The policy lines are based on four overall guiding principles: support the lifelong learning approach, keep control and achieve effectiveness, simplify and verify the requirements for accreditation and create synergies. The guiding principles are then differentiated into five main criteria, each of which is specified with several requirements and operative indications: Criterion A addresses infrastructural preconditions, logistics and resources of the VET provider; Criterion B refers to financial and economic trustworthiness; Criterion C addresses professional resources and managerial abilities; Criterion D relates to efficiency and effectiveness of the activities and Criterion E to the relationship of the provider organisation with the territory.

Before publication of new policy lines, accreditation requirements were stated in a resolution dating from 2007, still in application. As indicated in this resolution, to be accredited providers must demonstrate they meet the following requirements:

⁽³⁴⁾ ISFOL – Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers).

- concerning legal and financial requirements, applicants should demonstrate their legal form, give information on their capital stock, the statute of the organisation and the absence of criminal convictions;
- in relation to quality management, applicants have to provide information on their system in place. Many regions have adopted the ISO 9001:2000 system as a precondition for accreditation. In the Lombardy region it is a requirement for all VET providers wishing to be accredited to have ISO certification;
- applicants must demonstrate their managerial capacities by providing information on adequacy of the buildings, spaces dedicated to training, adequacy of technological tools and computers, information signs, and their operating hours;
- providers have to give proof of their economic reliability by submitting financial accounting documentation and certificates of accountability and solvency of their organisations;
- availability of appropriate professional skills has to be demonstrated by providing information on staff employed by the VET provider;
- relationships with the territory should be proved through formalised protocols of cooperation between VET providers and relevant players in their field of work.

It is up to the regions to define in detail technological and logistic equipment, indicators, thresholds, and periodical verification of requirements for accreditation.

3.5.2.3. *Process of accreditation*

The Lombardy region created two specialised websites, one for providing all necessary information on the accreditation process and documentation about the VET system in Lombardy ⁽³⁵⁾ and a second for accredited VET providers ⁽³⁶⁾ giving information on the ranking system. The guidelines for accreditation are available online in a new kit, called CRS, which allows use of the regional card of services (*Carta Regionale dei Servizi*) ⁽³⁷⁾.

Individual steps of the accreditation process can be summarised as follows:

- submission of application for accreditation by the VET provider;
- site visit by inspectors from the Lombardy region;
- validation of requirements by the region; and if successful
- online publication in the list of accredited centres.

⁽³⁵⁾ See: www.formalavoro.regione.lombardia.it (in Italian only).

⁽³⁶⁾ See: www.monitorweb.it (in Italian only; requires registration).

⁽³⁷⁾ More details are available at: <http://www.crs.lombardia.it> (in Italian only).

The entire application process can be done online by submission of electronic certified documents. After 30 days from submission, applicants will receive a response to their request. Accreditation must be renewed each year.

Applicants for accreditation not meeting all requirements are requested to fulfil their obligations to become or to stay accredited. If during one of the site visits requirements are not in place, accreditation is suspended for one year during which the VET organisation cannot provide training services. If after one year all requirements are in place, accreditation becomes valid again. If, after one year, requirements are still not met, there is a maximum period of five years foreseen before a provider can apply for accreditation again.

3.5.3. Results and impacts of accreditation

Successful accreditation implies a series of benefits for both providers and trainees. Training providers can propose their training programmes to the Lombardy region and the regional government will decide which programmes correspond to needs of the territory and support development of professional qualifications identified according to occupational standards.

For VET providers being accredited offers many benefits: access to funds for training unemployed/ employed in companies located in the territory, members of a network of VET providers and orientation centres and with the new legislation, collaboration with labour services centres as well.

With reform of training provision through the new DOTE system (or Dowry-system) more people are attracted to accredited VET providers. With this system, every employed person has access to EUR 5 000 for training provided by accredited bodies. This reform has changed the perspective by putting individual clients and their freedom of choice at the centre of the training offer. All financial resources provided by the Lombardy region for vocational training are entirely allocated and spent by individuals, who can freely choose from the catalogue of training programmes, which is available online on the region's website. Clients can also check the quality ranking of providers offering the training they are interested in.

3.5.4. Ranking system

The ranking system is part of the overall strategy of the Lombardy region to increase the quality of regional training provision. But although the aim is to use the ranking as a crucial part of the accreditation system, the Lombardy region has not adopted any measures yet for integrating results of the ranking into the process. The idea is to use the ranking as an added value to the basic standards for accreditation.

The ranking system was tested in 2006 and during 2007 it became crucial for development of the accreditation model for training providers. The ranking has the objective to measure the positioning of each training site from different points of view compared to the entire population of accredited providers. The model responds to the need to provide an overall ranking. Since the ranking was created as a consequence of the accreditation system it uses the same indicators further extended.

The system to calculate the ranking points for each training provider is based on a 'progressive' logic since the calculation is done every three months and redefined as a whole at the end of the year. It gives a real time picture of performances of providers, pointing out strengths and weaknesses.

The ranking evaluation is done by using the results achieved by providers in two main macro areas:

- (a) indicators regarding financially-supported training activities and in particular the comprehensiveness, efficiency and effectiveness of training activities themselves. Some examples of indicators are:
 - measurement of efficiency of the provider is based on the number of trainees in the financial report against the number of trainees foreseen to take part in that specific training activity;
 - effectiveness of the programme is evaluated based on the opinion the students have expressed in a questionnaire on customer satisfaction. Data are collected from a standardised questionnaire provided by the Lombardy region and distributed by the training provider, which inserts the results directly into the monitoring web of the region;
 - opinion of students on their employment situation is another indicator used to evaluate effectiveness of the programme. The number of the employed former trainees is calculated against the number of participants in training. Normally the Lombard region will call people after completion of the programme to verify their employment situations;
- (b) indicators that refer to technical equipment and logistics of the training site, the financial situation of the provider organisation, the professional competences of the human resources involved and the quality of relationships of the provider with the territory. Some examples:
 - professional competences of teachers and trainers are evaluated by measuring their level of education associated with years of working experience in this particular field;
 - relationship of the provider with competent bodies in the field of work in the territory is measured against the number of formally signed memorandums of cooperation.

Each indicator is the result of the sum of subindicators, divided into percentages according to proportional weight – 65% for indicators belonging to parameter (a) and 35% for indicators belonging to parameter (b) – up to a total evaluation of 100%.

The accreditation system has produced a large impact on the number and quality of VET providers in the Lombardy region. Thus, in the transition between the first and third accreditation phase a noticeable reduction in the number of accredited operational training providers occurred (from 1 739 to 945), which represents a reduction of approximately 45%. These figures can be interpreted as confirmation of the regional orientation to make the accreditation system a tool for classification of training and orientation services. In this perspective, accreditation and ranking systems could be key elements for programming training promoting innovation and quality of education.

3.5.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

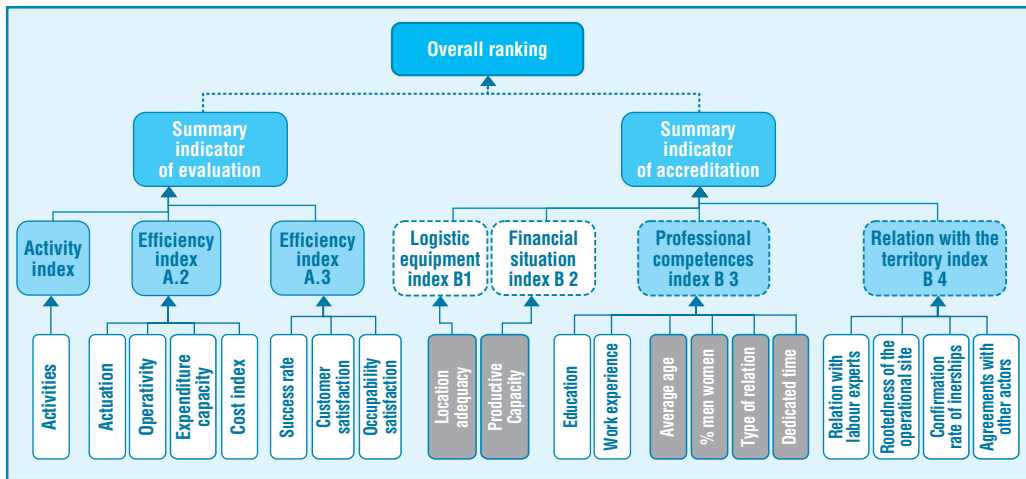
The current ranking system is unable to evaluate the new Dowry system, which has completely changed the way training is provided. In fact this new system changes the approach to training provision and turns trainees into clients: the quality and client satisfaction become paramount for the success of initiatives and survival of providers that are now inserted in a very competitive market. For better facing this challenge, the Lombardy region has started collaboration with Università degli Studi di Milano and Bicocca. This cooperation should result in identification, also through their application, of indicators and thresholds. IRER⁽³⁸⁾ has realised a good project that, if successful, will provide additional quality elements. They have identified two universities (mentioned above) that will use – with the same data – differentiated evaluation methodologies. ‘This could, autonomously and independently, give us more interesting insights, the originality of two actors making the same evaluation, drawing on the same data independently with different methods and methodologies. We will see what we can bring to a synthesis, to have indicators, which as much as possible meet our needs to evaluate the ability and in particular the quality (as much as possible the quality, I stress) of training provision⁽³⁹⁾.’

⁽³⁸⁾ IRER – Istituto Regionale di Ricerca della Lombardia (Lombardy Regional Institute for Research)

⁽³⁹⁾ According to an interview held with Mr M. De Nardo – Responsible for the accreditation system in the Lombardy region.

Results of the research will be used to identify indicators and insert them in the calls for tender for evaluators. In this way the independence of a third party for evaluation of the results of VET providers will be safeguarded, and a group of training providers ranked according to quality will be formed.

Figure 2. **The ranking system applied in Lombardy**



3.6. Romania

3.6.1. VET context

The Romanian Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for vocational education and training within the formal education system. It develops strategies and policies, prepares legislation and manages public education. It also approves curricula, national evaluation standards and the school network (Cedefop, Refernet, 2009f).

The vocational training system is organised as a network of national, local and sectoral stakeholders. On the legal and institutional side, the tripartite vocational training system of Romania is equivalent to systems applied in the rest of Europe. The system, however, does not operate at maximum potential due to lack of financial resources.

Training activities are planned based on an annual national framework programme, which brings together individual programmes developed by each county. Continuing training courses are organised within county training,

retraining and further training centres, schools or other training units. A new strategy for continuing vocational training taking into account the Lisbon objectives was approved in 2005 to support training for workers who will become redundant and promote training of the employed to adapt their skills to new requirements.

The general framework for quality assurance in education, applicable to all levels of pre-university (including initial and continuing VET) and higher education was set up by the Quality Assurance (QA) in Education Law (2006). The national quality assurance framework complies with the provisions in this law and with the methodologies and instruments developed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (Aracip), adding specific requirements of initial vocational training.

Government Ordinance No 129/2000 approved by Law No 375/2002 stipulates how to implement a national authorisation system of specialised training providers, a system based on which certificates issued at the end of different training programmes are recognised on the labour market. It also stipulates publication of a national register of specialised training providers authorised to give qualifications or graduation certificates recognised at national level. The same ordinance foresees setting up assessment centres (accredited by the National Council for Occupational Standards and Certification – NCOSC), where competences acquired in non-formal or informal education are also assessed and certified.

By the same Law 375/2002, the NCOSC integrated into the NATB, which deals more with regulating CVET provision than with policy development. The methodology for authorising and certifying adult vocational training and for registering qualifications was approved by a common order of the Minister for Labour, Social Solidarity and Family and the Minister for Education and Research in 2003.

In 1999, Romania set up the National Adult Training Board (NATB) as a social tripartite body (five representatives on behalf of government, five on behalf of trade unions and five representatives on behalf of employer confederations), with the following main aims:

- (a) accreditation of training providers, by specially appointed regional accreditation commissions, composed of specialists in various occupational domains and appointed on an ad-hoc basis;
- (b) development of occupational standards;
- (c) assessment and certification of professional competences in adult CVET.

3.6.2. Accreditation system

In 2006, the national quality assurance framework was legally adopted. Aracip became the key institution in creating a culture of quality and improvement of learning outcomes within pre-university education.

The National Centre for VET Development (CNDIPT) ensures adaption of the national framework to specific requirements of the VET system and assists VET providers and school inspectorates in the institutional building process.

The National Adult Training Board (NATB) is the national qualifications authority and empowered by law to support establishment of sectoral committees and coordinate their activities.

The national qualification framework (NQF) which is still under development, defines the structure of qualifications and assures national recognition of qualifications acquired through initial and continuing vocational training, in a formal, non-formal or informal way. NQF raised confidence in the relevance of nationally-recognised certificates issued by institutions authorised to train or evaluate competences. NQF contributes to assuring quality of the VET system based on national standards, used equally for training and for evaluation of competences, regardless the context in which they were acquired.

Sectoral committees are social dialogue structures in vocational training. They are, generally, of a multipartite structure (social partners, government, professional associations, trade chambers, training providers), work with technical staff (permanent and experts) and participate in development of the normative framework of training and temporary evaluation and certification of competences.

Quality assurance of sectoral committees' involvement (regarding occupational analyses, occupational standards development and validation and qualifications' development) is central to the NQF process. In addition, development of the national registry for qualifications constitutes the basis for obtaining information on the quality, accessibility and recognition of qualifications and their link to the labour market.

Implementation of a framework for quality assurance forms part of modernisation of the Romanian VET system, in which government deregulation signifies greater autonomy for VET providers. This puts new emphasis on quality assurance, quality control and quality improvement. The body responsible for action in this field is the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (AQAE). AQAE is in charge of comparing national quality developments with those in Europe, and in particular with the common quality assurance framework for VET (CQAF).

3.6.2.1. *Quality framework*

The Romanian national quality assurance framework (NQAF) is based on the common quality assurance framework for VET in Europe, and includes its principal elements (planning, implementation, evaluation, review and change, methodology).

The national quality assurance framework in VET includes all the quality criteria of the European common quality assurance framework, thus creating the premises of assuring a quality level in initial vocational training that meets European requirements. Seven quality principles are focused on performance of VET providers:

- quality management: management of each training provider organisation, develops the mission, vision and values of the organisation following consultative processes with the commission for evaluation and quality assurance;
- management responsibilities: management gets actively involved in quality assurance of learning programmes. Partnerships with stakeholders are developed and maintained. Relevant information is collected, stored and analysed regularly and communicated to stakeholders. There is effective financial management;
- resource management (physical and human): the organisation provides students with a safe and supportive environment. Learning spaces are properly equipped and meet the collective and individual needs of students. The resources, teaching methods and related premises allow access and active participation of all students. Staff are employed according to clear criteria (minimum standards regarding qualifications and experience) of recruitment and selection, the organisation defines job descriptions, evaluation of staff performance is transparent; there is a staff policy, that includes induction procedures and continuing training programmes;
- design, development and revision of learning programmes: the organisation is permanently concerned with improvement of learning programmes, to meet the needs of students and staff (internal stakeholders) and of employers and the community (external stakeholders). Learning programmes are centred on the student;
- teaching, training and learning: the organisation provides equal access to learning programmes and supports all students, preventing any form of discrimination. Students receive complete information about training provision and benefit from effective counselling and career guidance. Students' rights and responsibilities are clearly defined. Student-centred teaching and training methods are mainly used. Students are encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning processes;

- assessment and certification of learning: the organisation develops and uses various processes of assessment and monitoring of learning, to support students' progress. Teachers participate regularly in activities of standardisation of assessment. Assessment and certification meet national standards and legislation requirements;
- evaluation and improvement of quality: performance of the organisation is evaluated and monitored. Following identification of weaknesses through the evaluation process, improvement measures are developed. These are implemented and monitored, as part of a new cycle of quality assurance.

3.6.2.2. *Accreditation bodies*

Accreditation of VET providers is not mandatory in Romania. However, VET providers who want to deliver formally-recognised qualifications according to the NQF need an authorisation for relevant training programmes, which is done at local level by counties' accreditation commissions. For authorising VET providers, the NATB sets up authorising commissions, comprising experts representing employers' associations and trade unions, as well as experts from county school inspectorates and employment agencies. At national level, NATB will accredit only evaluation and certification centres, which are responsible for recognition of competences obtained in informal and non-formal education.

Accreditation is granted by order of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, based on approval of Aracip by complying with the accreditation procedure of the Quality Assurance in Education Law. It is performed by national bodies, all under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Research. The following bodies in charge of accreditation of VET providers in Romania are:

- Aracip – National Agency for Quality Assurance in initial education, coordinated by the Ministry of Education;
- CNFPA – National Adult Training Board (NATB), a tripartite social partnership body, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour;
- CNDITP – National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education, coordinated by the Ministry of Education;
- QA VET national reference point, a steering group with no juridical status, which acts as an interinstitutional dialogue group of key institutions/actors at national level (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, National Centre for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education, Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education, National Qualification Authority, National Adult Training Board, National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-university Education, FiaTest, the Quality House).

Additionally, specialised bodies are active in accreditation and certification of quality management systems, such as:

- RENAR – Romanian Accreditation Association of Personnel Certification Bodies;
- 22 quality management systems certification bodies (evaluating companies against ISO 9001 standard);
- Romanian Quality Award Foundation evaluating companies against EFQM Excellence model.

3.6.3. Accreditation of VET providers and programmes

In Romania, accreditation involves two successive stages:

- (a) provisional authorisation which entitles the institution to carry out training and organise admission to courses;
- (b) accreditation which confers the rights to issue diplomas, certificates and other study-related documents recognised by the Ministry of Education and Research and to organise graduation, master or doctoral exams.

Accreditation is compulsory for VET programmes, based on the Quality Assurance in Education Law. VET providers wishing to deliver qualifications within the NQF have to be accredited. Authorisation is granted to vocational training providers for each of the programmes they organise.

3.6.3.1. Authorisation and accreditation

The first step in the accreditation process is authorisation of a training provider. The criteria for evaluating vocational training providers to grant authorisation consider:

- the vocational training programme including information on conditions for access, objectives formulated in terms of professional competences to be acquired following training, and according to occupational standards defined at national level; duration and venue of training; number of participants; procedure for evaluation of programmes; content and assessment methods of participants;
- resources needed for carrying out the vocational training programmes, encompassing human, material and financial ones. Human resources refer to persons in possession of the necessary theoretical knowledge and practical experience. For obtaining authorisation, vocational training providers must prove they carry out training with trainers having the necessary educational background or specialisations, as well as the pedagogical training specific to adult vocational training.

Concerning material resources, vocational training providers applying for authorisation should have the appropriate facilities to provide theoretical and practical training, with appropriate equipment. Also, they have to make available to trainees the necessary course, teaching, documentation, and bibliographic material, and notebooks for practical applications. The equipment can be either owned by providers, or it can be rented, chartered, acquired through partnership, which implies availability of adequate financial resources;

- expertise in design, implementation, and results of training. The vocational training provider's expertise is proved by results of its previous training provision, as well as by the quality and expertise of the human resources involved in implementing the vocational training programme.

Authorisation of VET providers is done by the NATB and county commissions for a period of four years. During the four years the provider is monitored in at least three monitoring visits (one every 18 months), as well in additional visits, in case of complaints. Based on the reports presented by the monitoring teams, the county authorising commission can withdraw an authorisation.

Systematic follow-up of results of participants in VET programmes is encouraged. However, no empirical evidence of that process or of learning outcomes is available to date. It should therefore be noted that, while the capacity to provide vocational training increases in terms of numbers and variety of programmes, there is a major concern at governmental level to identify ways to ensure the quality of training, which remains for the time being, largely unknown.

3.6.3.2. *Process of accreditation*

For the accreditation process NATB offers methodological guidance, coordinates the provisional activity of authorising commissions and their technical secretariats. The procedure for authorisation includes the following steps:

- (a) the education provider draws up with the help of the accreditation department of the quality assurance agency an internal evaluation report together with an application for external evaluation and provisional authorisation of training delivery;
- (b) the accreditation department appoints a panel of experts in evaluation and accreditation, which analyses the internal evaluation report, visits the applicant institution to verify compliance with standards and criteria. Following which it draws up its own evaluation report;

- (c) the accreditation department of the quality assurance agency validates the experts' report by checking compliance with the external evaluation methodology. Then, the agency formulates a proposal to the Ministry of Education and Research on whether to grant provisional operation authorisation;
- (d) for providers of education at pre-university level, provisional authorisation is granted based on the recommendation of Aracip, by order of the Minister for Education and Research;
- (e) for providers of higher education, provisional authorisation is granted by government decision on the recommendation of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Aracis) and of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Following approval of provisional authorisation, the education provider has to submit, within two years since graduation of the first generation of students, an internal evaluation report and an application for starting the external evaluation and accreditation procedure. The accreditation procedure foresees steps similar to provisional authorisation.

Authorisation commissions consist of five members who authorise professional training providers, offer consultancy and information to them, monitor their activity and if needed, retrieve their authorisations.

According to accredited VET providers, the process may take from four months up to one year.

NATB is in charge of coordinating authorisation of VET providers and of drawing up the national register of all authorised CVET providers.

3.6.3.3. *Self-evaluation of VET providers and internal quality management*

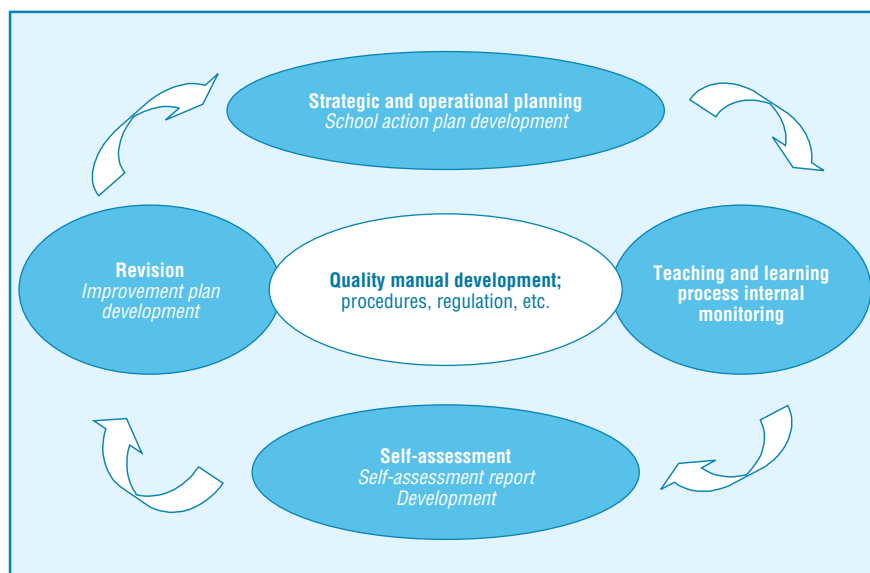
Self-evaluation and internal quality management are not considered preconditions for VET providers to receive an accreditation, but within each provider organisation, there should be a commission for quality assurance and evaluation. This commission prepares the quality manual that includes the quality policy, the procedures for quality assurance, documentation, decisions to allocate roles and responsibilities, etc. It also draws up the self-evaluation report and formulates proposals for improvement of quality at VET provider level, with support from the entire school staff.

The commission's strategy and operation rules are elaborated and adopted by the education provider. The head of the organisation is directly responsible for the quality of education provided, while operations management is performed either by the head of the organisation or by a coordinator appointed by him.

Further tasks of the commission for quality assurance and evaluation encompass strategic planning: setting up general objectives regarding quality assurance and operational planning, allocation of tasks, responsibilities and necessary resources. Internal monitoring is assured by the commission which verifies whether planned activities are carried out according to agreed terms and responsibilities, and evaluates the teaching and learning process through direct lesson observations. Internal monitoring serves to evaluate the school's difficulties in teaching and learning which impede attainment of established objectives and identify appropriate solutions.

Internal processes to assure quality at VET provider level used by the commissions for quality assurance and evaluation are based on the generic model shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Internal evaluation of VET providers in Romania



Source: Adapted from: Ministry of Education, Research and Youth/National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, 2008, p. 8.

3.6.4. Results and impacts of accreditation of adult training

Implementation of a national authorisation system is an important step towards fair competition among all public and private providers of adult

training. It should be noted that in Romania adult training may include IVET courses provided for adults. Neither authorisation nor accreditation of VET providers are compulsory, but only authorised providers are allowed to grant nationally-recognised certificates which eases mobility in the labour market. Non-authorised training programmes are sanctioned by certificates recognised by the company or provider who issues them. In 2009, the main results of the current system could be summarised as follows:

- implementation of a national system and creation of a market for CVET;
- a national registry of authorised (not accredited) providers of CVET for adults with 2 883 providers, of which 468 are public, 2 362 private and 53 public-private;

Commission for quality assurance and evaluation in Romania

Composition and tasks of the commission for quality assurance and evaluation

Tasks of the commission for quality assurance and evaluation.

Independently of the level the VET provider operates, the commission tasks are:

- (a) to coordinate implementation of the procedures and activities for quality assurance and evaluation, approved by management of the education provider;
- (b) to draw up, annually, an internal evaluation report on the quality of education in the organisation under consideration.
The report is made available to all beneficiaries by posting or publication;
- (c) to formulate proposals for improving the quality of education.

Composition of this commission:

A. Within providers of pre-university education, the internal commission for quality assurance and evaluation is composed of:

- (a) one to three representatives of the teaching staff elected by secret ballot by the teachers' council;
- (b) one representative of the trade union, designated by the latter;
- (c) one representative of the parents, in the nursery, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary and post-upper-secondary establishments;
- (d) one representative of the pupils, in the case of vocational, upper-secondary and post-upper-secondary schools;
- (e) one representative of the local council;
- (f) one representative of national minorities, which may be from among teachers', parents' or pupils' representatives.

B. The internal commission for quality assurance and evaluation of higher education providers includes:

- (a) one to three representatives of the teaching staff elected by secret ballot by the senate;
- (b) one representative of the trade union, designated by the latter;
- (c) one representative of the students designated by the students' organisation.

The commission may also include a representative of the employers, and a representative of the national minorities from among the teaching staff or students.

C. For any education provider who is not an educational institution, the commission for quality assurance and evaluation is composed of:

- (a) one to three representatives of the provider;
- (b) one to three representatives of the direct beneficiaries;
- (c) one to three representatives of the employers.

Members of the commission shall not hold leading positions in the educational institution or organisation, with the exception of the person ensuring its operative management.

- professional competences are articulated according to occupational standards and their corresponding training standards recognised at national level;
- granting over 910 000 nationally-recognised certificates.

Outcomes of the framework are discussed by the Ministry of Labour with the main specialised agencies, employer's confederations and trade unions, when a draft of the national employment plan is prepared. Each quarter the NATB analyses results of authorised and accredited training providers and each year trade unions and employers confederations make their own analysis, including professional training requirements.

The system ensures increased quality level in CVET for adults, but it will need to be further improved in conformity with the European reference framework for quality assurance in VET. Annual increases in the number of authorised programmes (18% yearly) and social partners' interest in development of the system can be considered as indications of increased quality.

There are no actual statistics or indicators, either at national or county level in Romania, allowing analysis of the relationship between the accreditation system and quality of the VET system. However, partial evaluations suggest that learning conditions have improved due to internal and external evaluation systems imposed by law on VET providers.

But, as long as the overall authorisation and accreditation process is not compulsory, and no clear deadlines are set in relevant legislation, no clear conclusions can be drawn on the impact of the process on quality of services.

Another important factor is very limited interest of VET providers in the ISO accreditation system: very few private VET providers have implemented a quality management system according to ISO 9001. RENAR, the national body for ISO accreditation, informed us that in 2008, only four education organisations applied for accreditation, of which one stepped out of the process before completion.

External evaluation is expected to enable VET providers to benchmark their performances against those of their local, regional, national and international peers. However, benchmarking would require identification of appropriate key indicators against which performance can be measured. Such key indicators are not set yet, but they may be produced as a result of self-evaluation performed by certain organisations.

3.6.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

Romania is making an effort at conceptual level, to synchronise with European developments in quality of training. Following accession to the EU, efforts

focused on harmonising lifelong learning with standards in Member States. In terms of normative and policy provisions, official texts are promoting measures comparable to the most advanced lifelong learning European approaches, including aspects such as access to training, recognition of prior learning and quality assurance for training provision. But in most cases, provisions lack concrete content to make them work in practice: aspects are presented in very general terms, without being followed by concrete strategies and measures, without establishing deadlines and performance indicators for impact evaluation.

There are still education and training providers who do not comply with the minimum set by the relevant laws. Efforts are therefore being put into 'cleaning' the market, by closing down organisations that do not meet the standards. In addition, the fact that no clear deadline between 'authorisation' and accreditation phases is set, allows organisations between the two stages to continue operating without real accreditation.

The main weakness of the system appears, however, to be lack of correlation of the quality system with the school inspectorate system. Central and local authorities do not accept easily 'bad news' resulting from evaluations. There is no culture of quality assurance based on facts. In addition, there is a lack of coherence between the initial professional training system and the higher education system, which prevents application of a global quality system.

There is, however, wide understanding of the above shortcomings by professionals in the sector. The most concrete interventions in 2010 concerned implementation of a project financed by the European Social Fund through the operational programme 'human resources development', to develop standards and evaluation methodologies for improving authorisation and accreditation systems, as well as dialogue to improve the legal framework and its harmonisation with systems of initial professional training and higher education.

3.7. UK/England

3.7.1. VET context

In the UK accreditation of VET provision has historically been provided by public and private organisations, companies and corporations working together, in some cases with charity status, where perceived vocational needs led to certification and thereby accreditation of training. Nowadays this is most linked to training beyond the level of compulsory school education which ends at 16 years old (Cedefop, Refernet, 2009g). This remains the fundamental, preconceived,

even legal perception of VET provision for most commentators. Recent policy development in the UK/England includes more than post-16 provision. Key to accreditation of VET providers and their associated accreditation processes, two policies can be observed at present and the immediate future:

- a new 14 to 19 years old pupil/student initiative which embraces schools, colleges, and where appropriate in cases of mixed provision even adult centres, universities and their articulation;
- creation of a national framework of qualifications (for England) which was and is manifestly important for the accreditation process since it provides it for quality control, inspection and even content/curriculum within VET.

The government policy-driven agenda for 14 to 19 years old and beyond curriculum is in the process of change. The government is drawing the various bodies and organisations into a more comprehensive and hopefully cohesive system of continuing education delivery. The proposed ending date for the period of transition and resetting new arrangements has been set for 2013. It must be noted, however, that the whole system will need time to bed down and become effective. The present can be considered as a period of change and transition.

In England accreditation inside VET is characterised by its historical – linear – evolution and, in recent times, considerable turmoil due to changes in policy (West, 2006). Underlying the accreditation system lays the fundamental division between further education (FE) (VET) and higher education (HE). The fundamental arguments for change refer to (a) overcoming the inherent divide between the more academic ('A' levels) and the vocational qualifications (Business and Technology Education Council – BTEC, etc.), (b) bringing FE (VET) and HE closer together in terms of accreditation and quality control and (c) provide a comprehensive training background for the contemporary economy. All these have implications for both FE (VET) and HE.

At the heart of the issue of accreditation of VET providers lies the question of the relationship between the multitude of organisations, institutions and 'accreditors' in the UK in general, but in England in particular (the country under analysis). The future lies not in defining just the 'provider' or a simple 'accreditor' but more accurately each stage of the 'process' of accreditation which includes all actors above and relies upon the careful but independent evaluation of the process by a range of agencies – each often with different competences and remits (Brockmann et al., 2008). Accreditation in that sense is not a simple first-time accreditation but a more lengthy and ongoing process. Accreditation becomes a mix of curriculum development, delivery and evaluation of training criteria set down by various agencies following parallel provisions for providers and 'accrediting' processes, often separate but interlinking (Simmons, 2008).

The most important fact to underline at this point is that the whole system is since 2007 in a period of transition, including its placement in a new ministerial department since May-June 2009. This transition phase is expected to last until 2013 when the new system for VET will be put into place – and there will be possibly no fundamental distinction in principle at least with the processes involved with general accreditation, between accreditation in FE (VET), colleges schools and even university education.

3.7.2. Accreditation system and accreditation bodies

Accreditation in England is more a process than a specific institutional awarding body: it is based on relations between government, ministries and agencies, and those who provide qualifications and curriculum development. It is to be noted that in 2010 there were approximately 160 awarding bodies cited accrediting qualifications within the national qualifications framework.

Usually each awarding body must go through a formal accreditation within the national framework. Simply put, VET providers will submit their credentials to the learning skills organisation (funding the training) and the local authorities in case the VET provider is a publicly-run college (such as a further education college) which is already authorised to deliver certain qualifications (by the awarding bodies, BTEC, City Guilds open college network (OCN), which develop and own and update these qualifications). These qualifications have to be included in the national database of qualifications (where levels of qualifications are attributed) and to be presented to the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to be recognised as a national qualification. It should be noted that the QCA and the newly formed Quality Agency (OfQual) are going to be amalgamated ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

VET accreditation is a process that involves the following elements for the programmes:

- registration of programmes and curriculum (with VET providers but linked to the new national framework);
- authorisation and approval procedures (with VET providers but also linked to criteria set out by the new national framework and advised through bodies and agencies such as OfSted and the relevant new ministry linking business, VET, schools, skills and universities which was created in May-June 2009;
- licensing or equivalents of providers and provision (such as OfQual);
- certification of trainees/participants (by VET providers, but the impact of State agencies is becoming more important);

⁽⁴⁰⁾ For further details on QCA see: QCA et al. (2006) and the QCA website: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/> [cited 8.4.2011].

- quality inspection and recommendations (by VET providers, but with more pressure and guidance from OfSted, QAA, OfQual, etc.) ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Therefore accreditation is the outcome of involvement of a mix of (a) awarding bodies which ‘accredit’ or – as put more recently – ‘approve’ those who provide qualifications leading to diplomas in FE (VET) colleges, FE (VET) or even to foundation programmes giving access to HE, which are equally ‘accredited’ by (b) the regulatory system being ministerial agency or local authority which accredits the awarding bodies and/or the providers, for example FE (VET) colleges. This is done to ensure application and inspection of standards in institutions and programmes already accredited.

Accreditation is part of the ‘regulatory focus’ inside a governmentally-defined process between the ‘demand-side’ and ‘supply-side’. From a regulatory government point of view ‘accrediting’ organisations will be led by OfQual, the ministry (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills – DIUS, now Department for Business Innovation and Skills – BIS 2009/10) and Skills Funding Agency (at present the Learning Skills Council – LSC); the present UK/England accreditation and regulatory system is in transition, although, Figure 4 indicates what is and will be the structure in which accreditation of awarding bodies and the accrediting regulatory authority, will operate.

There are several accreditation bodies in England, which are licensed by the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority). In 2009/10, it came under the Qualification Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) linked closely to the new ‘Office of the qualifications and examinations regulator) OfQual created by law and operating since 2009 under the new Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS).

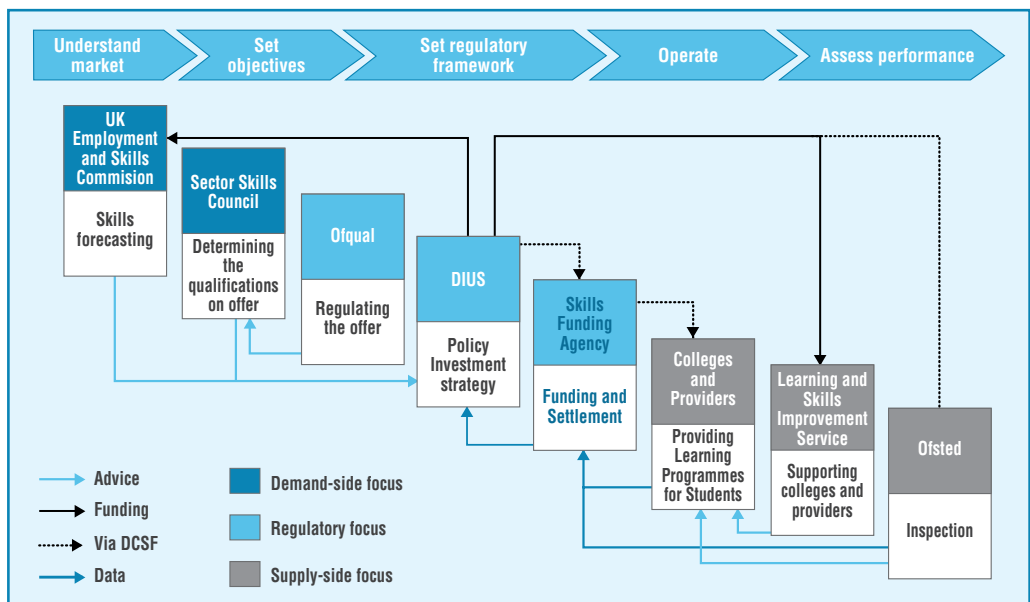
As the UK/England system regulates through a tripartite system – regulatory agency (OfQual), the ministry (DIUS now BIS) and the funding agency (LSC-SFA) the role of the latter is of major importance. Its relationship with the various agencies surrounding and informing VET provision is complex, but Figure 5 indicates at least some of the major connections. Whether private or public awarding bodies, they will all have to engage with OfQual for ‘approval’ and therefore ‘accreditation’.

⁽⁴¹⁾ For details on the workings of OfSted and its relationship to FE (VET), see annual reports 2005/6-2007/8 (available from Internet: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Annual-Report/2005-06> and <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Annual-Report/2007-08> [both cited 8.4.2011]; OfSted, Further Education matters: the first four years of OfSted/ALI college inspections, November 2005; OfSted, 2007.

As it can be seen from Figures 5 and 6 there is a whole range of institutions that surround funding and accreditation processes and 'set the criteria'. None the less, OfQual, with its overarching role is probably the most important of these institutions with the FE (VET) funding body; the Learning and Skills Council, now called the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

Creation of a new FE structure was initiated in 2007. Accredited programmes would be linked to what was seen as a more tangible and connected funding arrangement targeted at a range of areas from learner skills to college provision. Linking national apprenticeships to accredited programmes was seen as an essential step forward as Figure 5 illustrates.

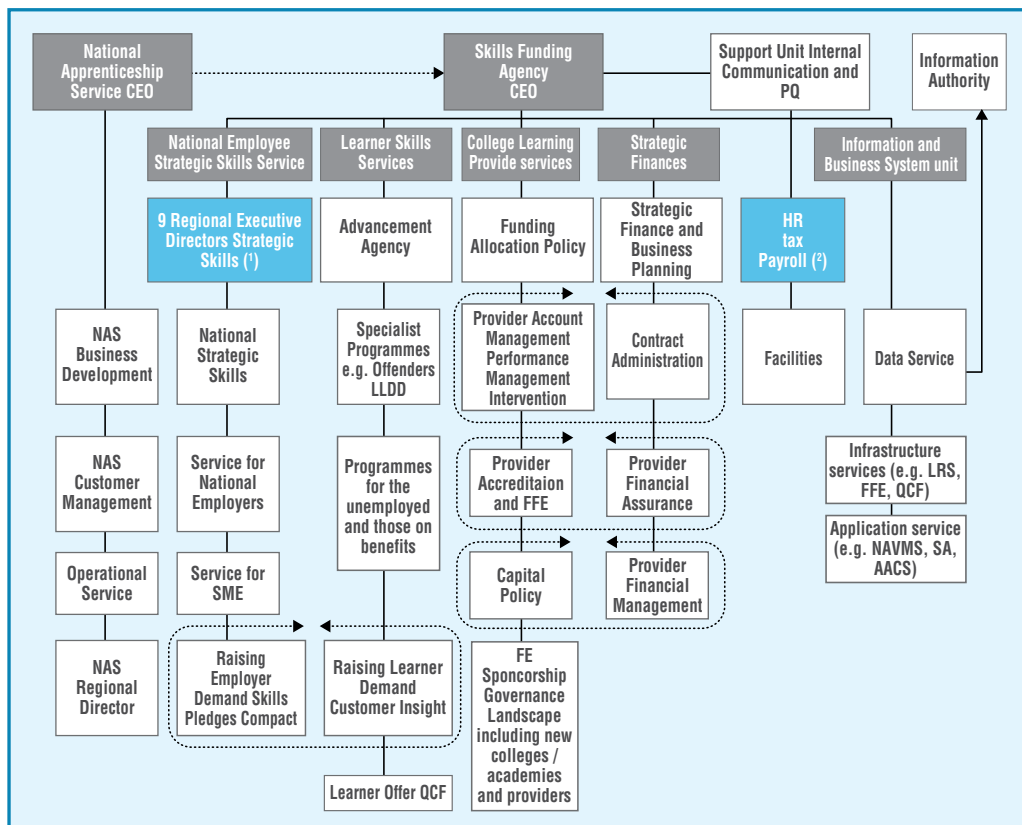
Figure 4. **Post-19 learning and skills delivery chain in UK/England (indicative)**



NB: The work of DIUS has now become part of the Department for Business Information and Skills (BIS), but was the working model at the time of access and is indicative of government thinking in procedural and structural terms. Funding and organisational matters, including accreditation within the UK, and especially in England (Wales and Scotland are using different precepts it seems), are now subject to considerable realignment following creation of the 'coalition government' (2010), and it is expected that new actors and therefore new procedures and organisational relationships will be made clearer in the next two years.

Source: Department of Innovation Universities and Skills. FE and skills system: an update. December 2008. Available from Internet: http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/files/resources__FE_&_skills_reform_update.pdf [cited 25.1.2011].

Figure 5. Organisational structure of Skills Funding Agency in UK/ England (indicative)



Source: Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS). NB: The work of DIUS has now become part of the Department for Business Information and Skills (BIS), but was the working model at the time of access and is indicative of government thinking in procedural and structural terms. Funding and organisational matters, including accreditation within the UK, and especially in England (Wales and Scotland are using different precepts it seems), are now subject to considerable realignment following the creation of the 'coalition government' (2010), and it is expected that new actors and therefore new procedures and organisational relationships will be made clearer in the next two years.

QfQual, as other regulators, publishes criteria that specify how qualifications must meet explicit standards before they can be accredited. There are two types of criteria: qualification criteria that give broad rules on the structure, evaluation and grading of particular qualifications and subject criteria that outline the essential knowledge, skills and understanding present in all specifications irrespective of the awarding body, and give details of the evaluation scheme

and objectives. Awarding bodies use these criteria to develop qualification specifications. The regulators use the criteria in the accreditation process.

The UK/England system is a multiagency one driven by process and implementation. The system foresees a divided responsibilities model for VET provision (and HE): content comes through expert ‘approval processes’, operational management through site visits and the results and review process through inspection (OfSted). All accrediting or awarding organisations need to take this model into consideration and adjust themselves accordingly.

The past system which allowed for individual accrediting organisations to be a one-off and closed system of accreditation has been fundamentally altered and made more transparent and comparable to the national framework now in place. Each involved agency (for example OCN as an accrediting organisation, BTEC or City and Guilds as awarding bodies; see below) is trained and advised with reference to control (local councils and central government), sector relevance (accrediting organisations of training using teaching expertise and curriculum development) and evaluation (of teachers, certificates and attainment).

At regulatory level, again, the role of OfQual (and previously the QCA) is of prime importance, since it is the regulator of qualifications, exams and tests in England’. It regulates the awarding organisations, ensuring that they offer good systems in place and they account for performance. But most important is the overarching control power of OfQual since it is stipulated that: accredited qualifications can only be offered by awarding bodies that OfQual recognises. In the past many awarding bodies would have accredited or approved their own curricula. This now takes place exclusively at QCA/OfQual level. In the corresponding literature there will often be words used for accreditation; ‘accreditation, approval, licensed, authorised, certified’ and in OfQual terms ‘recognised’ are some examples.

3.7.2.1. *Awarding qualifications providers*

Becoming an awarding body presupposes the following:

- to offer accredited qualifications, awarding institutions must be recognised by the regulators of external qualifications;
- regulators check that the awarding institution has the necessary systems in place to deliver national qualifications effectively and to the appropriate standards.

Developing qualifications:

- once an awarding organisation is recognised, it can develop qualifications and submit them to the regulator for accreditation (approval);
- before beginning the development process, awarding bodies should contact OfQual.

Accreditation process of qualifications:

- awarding bodies submit their qualifications for accreditation by the regulator within the web-based accreditation system;
- regulators check that qualifications meet the required criteria before accrediting them.

Administering examinations:

- awarding bodies must comply with the statutory regulations for external qualifications and the relevant code of practice.

3.7.2.2. *Criteria for recognition of awarding bodies*

The awarding institution must publish a customer service statement that specifies among others the quality of service that customers can expect in relation to qualifications and the fee structure that will apply to qualification or to its verification.

The level of scrutiny that the regulatory authorities apply to the proposed qualifications of the awarding bodies at the accreditation stage will depend on the ability of the awarding body to demonstrate consistently the quality of its performance in the following key areas:

- the appropriateness and robustness of the awarding body's processes for developing qualifications;
- the robustness of the awarding body's quality assurance procedures and arrangements.

In doing so, the regulatory authorities will consider a number of issues, for example, the awarding body's performance against agreed public performance measures, the awarding body's track record in respect of the volume of complaints it receives from users of its qualifications and the way in which it deals with those complaints.

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulatory authorities will systematically monitor awarding bodies against the requirements set out and their accreditation criteria. The regulatory authorities will plan jointly monitoring programmes that focus on quality and probity in the work of awarding bodies. Such monitoring will supply the evidence for taking any necessary action. Awarding providers will be informed of the outcomes of the work of the regulatory authorities that have an impact on their activities.

There is much debate concerning effectiveness and efficiency of training activities. This is an area for research that needs further analysis to be meaningful in the UK/England setting. Overall it is the power of the 'market' and the forces of choice and competition and increasingly the competence-value

to the private sector that dominates educational let alone VET provision.

The best and fullest range of criteria is statutorily arranged and available in a 56-page document (QCA, 2004). Its most important aspect is that for all curricula, the criteria used by all awarding bodies and in principle their regulation, must be implemented following the national framework of qualifications.

3.7.2.3. *Examples of accreditation/or awarding bodies*

Open college network (OCN)

With other accrediting organisations or awarding bodies such as City and Guilds and BTEC, Edexcel, OCN accreditation is seen as a prime example of a past regulatory system still in place. It too will have to adapt to the new models of regulatory control. OCN could be seen as an accrediting organisation which bridges FE (VET) and HE provision. It ‘approves’ or ‘accredits’ in its own right ‘access and foundation’ courses often based at FE (VET) colleges but which allow entry into HE (university) courses.

OCN origins go back to 1981 and it consists of nine regional centres in UK. Regional centres have responsibility for collating and administering applications of VET providers for approval. Normally a coordinating tutor from the provider organisation is responsible for preparation of the submission document. The regional OCN discusses and advises on the completion of documents following accompanying guidelines. The work is credited into modules or units with set procedures for allocation of credits. An ‘approval panel’ with a nominated ‘chair’ from OCN is convened with the participating organisation scrutinised by external experts and peer group input. The approval panel ensures that the specifications of its common credit framework have been adhered to; that the qualification specification is appropriate; and that there are methods for recording individual achievement. The panel also ensures that the proposal is ‘fit for purpose’.

The initial decision-making rests with the ‘approval panel’ and it is then monitored through critical review, normally on a yearly basis. The members of the approval panels are selected in terms of externality, objectivity and consistency of processes, the latter is important in maintaining levels across different programmes. Panel members are invited to for their expertise in the curriculum areas under scrutiny and their experience of OCN accreditation. The panel composition must be cross-sector and include representatives independent of the presenting providers.

Following initial approval, there is normally an annual review, changes of

minor issues may be recorded and noted, but after five years the programme will normally be revalidated and fully reviewed.

Criteria for accreditation of targeted courses that bridge FE (VET) and HE
Submission documents for approval should cover the following criteria/questions: relationship between aims, taught content, assessment and the units; are the aims, content and assessments appropriate to the needs of the target group? Is the teaching content sufficient to cover the learning outcomes in the units? Are the assessments explicit and appropriate? Do assessment methods cover all aims? Is assessment appropriate to level? Is there proof that assessment methods are 'valid, reliable, inclusive and equitable'? Evidence of moderation at both internal and external level – VET moderation plus external examination; do methods of recording exist?

The moderation process, meaning judgement by those in a competent agency or advisory group, is most important for levels inside the national framework and evaluation of its provision. In addition VET colleges (the FE sector) are inspected frequently – and in effect annually by inspectors from either OfSted or Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) depending on the programmes and their level.

For site visits full training and expertise is drawn from teaching and lecturer inspectors' teams (OfSted). Regarding academic and targeted content, approval of aims and teaching learning outcomes, the OCN 'approval panels' need to include confirmed 'experts' in the specific field as commentators.

Quality management of the accreditation institution is a matter for the ministry and its control agency depending on the case in hand. The QCA licensed OCN and collects evidence from regular control.

Inspection of the institutions themselves which provide the 'accredited qualifications' approved or recognised by accrediting bodies such as OCN (such as FE colleges) is done by other agencies. The overall VET site inspection is covered by the procedures of the Learning and Skills Council who report annually on teaching and overall management of sites with particular regard to funding arrangements. However this inspection which underscores delivery of accredited programmes has been heavily criticised and is being replaced in 2010 by the Skills Funding Agency.

Edexcel and BTEC

EdExcel is a VET provider which owns certain qualifications and the same applies to BTEC. However Edexcel and BTEC cooperate in delivering certain qualifications. Under these terms, they represent an interesting example of an awarding body with a long track record. They used to accredit in their own right and are now ‘accredited’ or ‘approved’ awarding bodies with considerable experience in FE (VET) provision.

Edexcel/BTEC was established in 1996 and licensed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for provision of vocational qualifications in several fields. The organisation is a key example of the prevailing situation where training and education (including the VET sector) are part of business models and work in partnership with political and State authorities in provision of curriculum and accredited programmes.

Edexcel/BTEC follows the NVQ (national vocational qualifications) code of practice first published in 2001 and revised in 2006 (QCA, 2006). The details are full and wide ranging but VET providers or candidates for accreditation are guided by the Edexcel/BTEC teams to ensure that they may be approved. In effect the range of guidance covers the complete process from start to end and is administered by regional teams.

Edexcel/BTEC makes the final ‘awarding’ decisions but relies heavily on both internal and external ‘verifiers’ for site visits and the committee presentation of curriculum and standards. It is said that BTEC awards with vocational background are introduced across the UK in 2 500 schools and 450 colleges already. It should be noted that BTEC provides awards outside VET also.

After approval – and there are very strict guidelines on timing, procedures and internal verification – review of the provider is frequent with normally two or more site visits and annual reporting. To be accurate, there are variations in the procedure depending on subject matter and qualification level.

Criteria for accreditation/approval of Edexcel/BTEC qualifications for a provider

The criteria for accreditation/approval are very detailed and most especially for the first accreditation. The following indicates some of the main criteria in use by Edexcel/BTEC, but the list is not exhaustive and in practice it is even more detailed ⁽⁴²⁾.

⁽⁴²⁾ For more information, see: <http://www.edexcel.com/Pages/home.aspx> [cited 2.1.2011]. For the full range of support advice offered by Edexcel to its customers/clients and includes NVQ approval; BTEC (customised) approval; BTEC (NQF) approval; and skills for life approval for Learndirect centres, see: <http://www.edexcel.com/i-am-a/tp/ss/Pages/home.aspx> [cited 2.1.2011].

- evidence of following NVQ guidance including internal verification guidance procedures;
- monitoring of assessment material with records and feedback;
- sampling of assessment work and comments;
- reactions to external reports;
- records of evaluator meetings, records of internal meetings;
- appeals and complaints procedures;
- equal opportunity practice, health and safety guidance;
- assessment tools and induction profiles;
- training and support material.

In addition the internal verification is very detailed and laid out fully in advance before the external visits of the awarding body and it will be inspected or 'approved' as defined by the accreditation system ⁽⁴³⁾:

- programmes to be verified, with internal reports and verification processes, sampling of candidate work, meetings, assurance and profiling;
- evidence of NVQ levels using NVQ guidance.

It is important to underline that the awarding body is constantly referring back and forth to the accrediting regulatory system: which proves the major regulatory role of providing advice in the sector and its relation to the national framework, both VET providers and Edexcel, the accrediting body must use and refer to at all times. Accrediting is a multilayered, multicentred, regulatory process from inception to delivery and is verified as a whole process, not in isolated parts.

There are strict guidelines for external and internal 'verifiers'; under the guidance of NVQ to ensure: transparency, equity and consistency of treatment from the side of the awarding bodies to the centres they approve. In this way, public confidence in the quality assurance and control, in the arrangements concerning implementation and evaluation of NVQs is reinforced. Edexcel offers additional (paid fee) training to this effect where appropriate.

Site visits are an essential part of Edexcel practice and service to clients. Instructions on the process are very precise and they cover among others: pre-visit, internal verification, preparation of material, role of evaluators and external verifiers, document lists, appeals and procedures. Reports are reviewed and recommendations are proposed at every stage of the process. Edexcel assists VET providers in submitting their applications and in reaching standards. Usually accreditation takes several months.

⁽⁴³⁾ For more information, see: <http://www.edexcel.com/Pages/home.aspx> [cited 2.1.2011].

3.7.3. Self-evaluation of VET providers and internal QM

VET providers have to consider the criteria asked for by the awarding body (through NVQ usually) which will approve their training programmes (BTEC, City and Guilds, etc.) and the criteria (and advice) of the qualifications agency (OfQual) and the inspection process (OfSted).

Self-evaluation and peer review are essential for evaluation of accreditation criteria with external verifiers, moderators or examiners who verify the procedure. This applies to providers, awarding bodies and registered official colleges. There are various procedures and even criteria that fit with the many awarding bodies (see above) but they are often linked to content rather than methods and evaluation.

Although all regulators have their own 'systems' and agendas they do conform to essential instructions and guidelines. In particular:

- the NVQ code of practice (2006) OfQual promoted;
- the handbook for inspecting work-related and adult and community learning, issued by OfSted in 2008.

The analysis below is based on them and, where appropriate, parts of them are quoted.

Criteria for inspection of self-evaluation and monitoring procedures established within VET providers

According to the NVQ code of practice the following demands have to be fulfilled by VET providers: each centre must operate explicit and written internal verification to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the evaluation decisions between the evaluators operating at the centre. Evaluators should be consistent in their interpretation and application of the national occupational standards in the awarding procedure.

Further, VET providers must appoint internal verifiers responsible for:

- 'regularly sampling evidence of evaluation decisions made by all evaluators across all aspects of NVQ evaluation;
- maintaining up-to-date records of internal verification and sampling activity and ensuring that these are available for external verification;
- monitoring and supporting the work of evaluators;
- easing appropriate staff development and training for evaluators;
- providing feedback to the external verifier on the effectiveness of evaluation;
- ensuring that any corrective action required by the awarding body is carried out within agreed time-scales.' (QCA, 2006, p. 14).

Centres must ensure that internal verifiers are competent to perform their roles. Centres must therefore provide them with appropriate training and development opportunities.

Awarding bodies must monitor the centres' compliance with these requirements through the centres' own quality assurance arrangements. Guidance by the awarding body must cover:

- procedures for standardising evaluation so evaluators can operate to the same standard;
- models for developing an internal verification sampling plan;
- types of records the centres must keep to demonstrate the effectiveness of their internal verification procedures (QCA, 2006, p. 15).

According to the handbook for inspecting work-related, adult and community learning, self-evaluation of providers is a main precondition for successful accreditation. Prior to overall evaluation and accreditation, each provider organisation/institution has to define its work in a self-evaluation report (SAR) which will form the basis of the evaluation. This marks the recent tendency of using a self-evaluation document as a more 'quality-based' briefing report. The SAR will provide inspectors with crucial evidence to evaluate the quality of leadership and management and the provider's capacity to improve. In all inspections the SAR will help the LI (lead inspector) to write the preinspection commentary. During the inspection, inspectors' findings will be compared with judgements in the SAR and discussed at team meetings and with the provider.

Rigorous self-evaluation and effective action planning to address identified areas for improvement should be an integral part of providers' management systems. Providers should produce an annual self-evaluation report, which makes graded judgements against evaluation requirements. It should be supported by a development plan that shows how the provider will address areas for improvement and build on strengths. For internal purposes providers may choose whatever process and model best meets their needs.

An appendix of the SAR should contain key data on, for example, current enrolments by sector subject area, type of programme and age of learners as well as information on their success rates, on differences between their groups.

The inspection team will consider how inclusive the process is (involvement of staff, consultation with learners, contributions from subcontractors and other external partners), how well data are used to make appropriate judgements about success rates, course completion and job outcomes, the regularity of the process in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in a timely way and whether the strengths and areas for improvement in the report have a significant impact on learners or not.

The main purposes of inspection are to give an independent public account of the quality of education and training, the standards achieved and the efficiency with which resources are managed, to help bring about improvement by identifying strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting good practice and judging what steps need to be taken to improve provision. Inspection provides information on the quality and standards of education and training to a series of stakeholders like the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Innovation Universities and Skills and for Work and Pensions as well as the Learning and Skills Council for England. Inspection promotes also a culture of self-evaluation among providers, leading to continuous improvement or maintenance of very high quality standards.

The FfE (framework for excellence) is a performance evaluation framework that considers a wide range of provider activity. The key dimensions cover annual measures of responsiveness, effectiveness and financial efficiency. From 2008/09, the FfE applies to all further education, tertiary, sixth-form, agriculture and horticulture and art and design colleges and to all private training providers that deliver ‘apprenticeships’ or ‘train to gain’, the new government initiatives linked to youth and youth unemployment and welfare.

Each awarding body offers advice on the duration of the accreditation process: it varies from months to years, though in most important cases it appears that a time span of 18 to 24 months is a normally accepted period.

3.7.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

The public dissemination and transparency of policy outcomes has become an ‘industry in itself’. This applies to both public and private sectors. It applies to education in the widest sense and at every level and it includes further educational provision from colleges to private organisations. Government policy through statistics and statistical offices has increased enormously in the past 20 years and in the past five years in particular where digitisation of data and of information has accelerated the amount of material available to all those engaged in the sector.

The transparency and openness of accreditation and accredited organisations has been parallel to development of a ‘comparability/tendency’. This has been driven not only by the nature of standards and their evaluation but also by use of benchmarking and a ‘best practice’ approach. Nowadays their agencies will decide on funding and delivery of programmes and on their effectiveness by relying on inspection. Gone are the days when a professional association would award a certificate resting on its own reputation alone.

Most accrediting and governing institutions in VET provision in the UK/England have encouraged open reporting because it allows constant updating through best practice of standards. Dissemination of results of both the accreditation process and its implementation are seen as increasingly important in the policy sphere where transparency and public knowledge and thereby choices for providers and students can be improved through evidence-based data and information.

As already stated, the direct changes of VET provision show there is wider policy movement to introduce higher education values into further education vocationally-orientated training. This is a live issue, which affects the very deep roots of the UK/England culture and educational establishment.

3.7.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

The UK/England system maintains a ‘division of purpose’ approach in its overall accreditation process, that is a balance and at the same time an effective bridge between curriculum development, professional standards, institutional organisation, funding, management and assurance of quality. However, the VET provider is in the end the major interface, the connection between awarding bodies, funding instances and ‘clients’ – being physical persons or corporate training needs. As such VET providers, private or public, shape the landscape because they are the ones to choose among the offers on curricula and diplomas by awarding bodies, according to their needs.

But concerning the accreditation process itself, VET providers will not necessarily shape the criteria or the standards in use: these are set by awarding bodies or the regulators. The latter will be sensitive, normally, to pressures from professional or training associations in relation to constant updating of competences to maintain standards, and in relation to funding of training emanating from taxation and public sources, private individuals or corporate investment.

The growing importance of inspection and especially of the work of OfSted is crucial for the UK/England VET landscape. In addition, and encouraged at ministerial level, FE colleges and VET institutions offer programmes some of which belong to higher education. This has led to a mixing up a certain degree, or even to some converging, of quality management procedures to OfQual and HE sector-QAA procedures.

In most programmes delivered by VET training establishments, the reputation of the awarding body and the procedures it stipulates are the most notable guarantee for quality. In addition many awarding bodies are long-standing professional associations, such as the accounting branch, for instance.

In the recent past, use of ISO and EFQM as quality labels was considered an important value-added. None the less, today they are seen as parallel and reinforcing mechanisms rather than essential to the accreditation process.

Since the 1970s, professionalisation and quality labels started being considered in discussions about a more comparable national vocational framework which covers now both further and higher education. Quality is now increasingly linked to accredited levels and standards for each phase of the educational framework within the UK/England (Billing, 1996). In that sense quality has become increasingly embedded in programmes and the 'quality labelling' coming from outside the institution itself, is an addition to the core focus of training and pedagogy (Holloway, 2009).

Overall, during the past 20 years, the VET sector and all stakeholders within it in UK/England have gone through a period of transition and reflection until establishment of an accreditation process (Simmons, 2009). The fact this is now a reality is considered a major success. However, careful reading of the consultation process on recent changes reveals deep disagreement about what some consider increasing centralised regulation and stifling innovation. This contradicts somewhat with governmental views which consider that recent changes provide innovation, flexibility and acceptable standards and represent a crucial policy development for the future. This important debate has not yet reached full consensus.

Sectoral examples of accreditation in VET

It is important to stress here that dealing here with accreditations set up and run by professional organisations of certain sectors, the focus of our analysis changes: we do not refer to a national quality framework anymore which covers the whole training process from input to impacts but only to some elements of this process. For instance, the two cases that follow on the tourism and welding sectors put particular emphasis on the qualifications of trainers something not shared by the other two examples analysed in the present study.

4.1. Banking and financial services sector

4.1.1. VET context

In the banking and financial services sector, IVET is organised according to national legislation and rules, CVET is partly organised by national bank training institutions, partly by training departments of the big banks themselves. In some countries there is only one national bank training institution.

The present case study describes the accreditation system in CVET, which has been developed by the European Banking and Financial Services Training Association Asbl (EBTN). EBTN was established in 1991 as a not for profit association, made up of leading bank training organisations in Europe. Since June 2007, its name changed to European Banking and Financial Services Training Association EBTN Asbl. EBTN has 36 full members from 28 countries (July 2008). Beyond that EBTN has 11 associate members from countries outside Europe. EBTN covers most of the EU Member States.

After 1989 and subsequent political changes, there has been increasing demand for standards and quality assurance as well as benchmarking at European level. Especially bank institutions and bank training organisations from eastern European countries wanted to demonstrate that they apply international standards by means of internationally-acknowledged instruments. On the one hand, development of an accreditation system was a demand from EBTN member institutions; on the other, it was an initiative of EBTN, which corresponded to the aim of improving quality and developing comparable standards. The idea for accreditation and certification by EBTN arose because

of the need for comparability. Discussions among country members revealed a need for common standards. This converged with the strategic goals of EBTN to offer European-wide acknowledged certificates. In most countries there were (and still are) national quality labels based on different national settings. Thus, EBTN's aims through its accreditation system were harmonisation, visibility and comparability among organisations from different countries. Further, creation of an accreditation system should support the employability and mobility of employees in the European financial services sector.

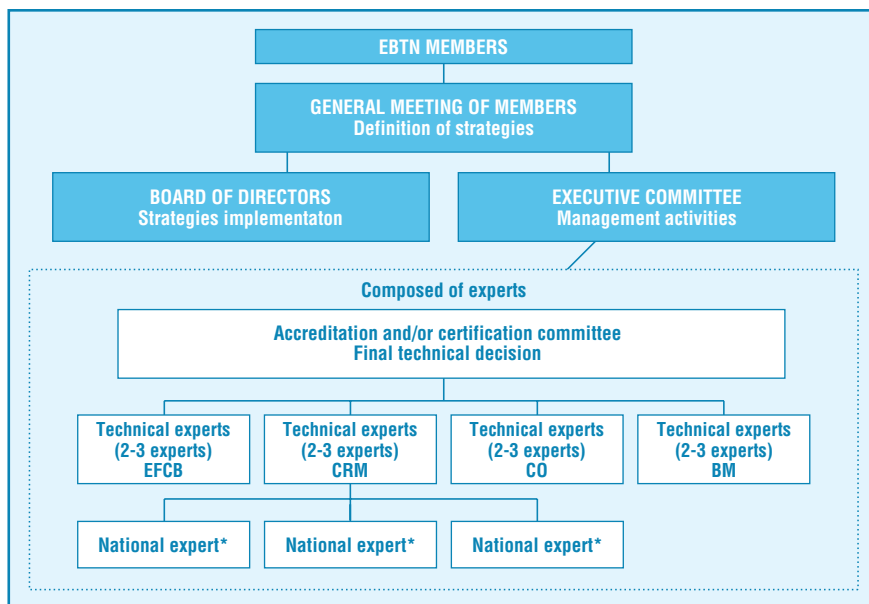
EBTN has dealt with questions of quality assurance and improvement as well as of standardisation and comparability within the European market for several years and in several European pilot projects. The European common quality assurance framework (CQAF) was taken on board in a project called Eurobanqua, in which a 'sectoral version' of the CQAF was developed. In another project named Qualobster the resulting quality assurance framework was combined with previous work of EBTN members to develop a self-evaluation instrument and a benchmarking toolkit for implementing the principles of a learning organisation in several banks. At the same time relevant efforts were undertaken to improve delivery of banking certificates by means of a more competence-based assessment. A project called Certified proposed an accreditation and certification system to make sure that training providers issuing EBTN certificates and qualifications (of EQF levels 4 and 5) would have gone through a process of quality assurance.

4.1.2. Accreditation system and quality framework

The responsible accreditation body is EBTN; its Board of Directors takes the formal decision on accreditation. The decision is based on a recommendation of the accreditation and certification committee (A&CC) that draws upon a recommendation of a technical expert group (TEG). In fact, the accreditation system in place started with establishment of the A&CC at the end of 2007, but its roots go back to 2003. From 2003 to 2007, an informal committee consisting of four to five representatives of EBTN members took a decision on accreditation of institutions.

The newly created A&CC is composed of external experts (such as university professors) and is independent of EBTN. Members must be experts in financial services and/or education, training, accreditation and certification and are appointed by the Board of Directors for a two-year period. They can be reappointed immediately, but they should serve no more than two terms. In delivering EBTN certificates, the A&CC is autonomous in all its technical decisions concerning accreditation of EBTN members.

Figure 6. Organisational structure of EBTN



Legend:

EFCB: European foundation certificate in banking

CRM: Customer risk management

CO: Chief officer

BM: Banking management

* Number of national experts varies, is not defined.

Source: Adapted from EBTN statute. Available from Internet: <http://www.ebtn.eu/index2.html> [cited 24.1.2011].

The A&CC advises the Board of Directors on the general principles, procedures and operations of the accreditation and certification system, the certificates to be issued by EBTN, how EBTN members are accredited for these certificates and the conditions for maintaining such accreditation. It is supported in its work by a subcommittee dedicated to certification as indicated in Figure 6.

The A&CC submits to the board a proposal that EBTN members should be recognised as accredited to deliver certain certificates, for example branch manager or risk manager. Its recommendation is based on information delivered by the technical expert group (TEG). Members of the TEG are content experts in the area concerned and work with national experts.

The TEG defines learning outcomes/testing standards for any new certificate identified by A&CC. Learning outcomes should be defined by knowledge, skills

and/or competences. It is the TEG's role to call attention to changes in the market in respect of learning outcomes requirements set for a particular certificate and to draft a proposal for the A&CC to update learning outcomes.

Granting accreditation allows banking training institutions to issue an EBTN certificate recognised by its members, the most popular of which is the European foundation certificate in banking (EFCB). Accreditations of other certificates, for example for a qualification in risk management, are to follow in the near future.

Extract from the European foundation certificate in banking (EFCB)

Bank employees who have obtained the EFCB have a basic understanding of:

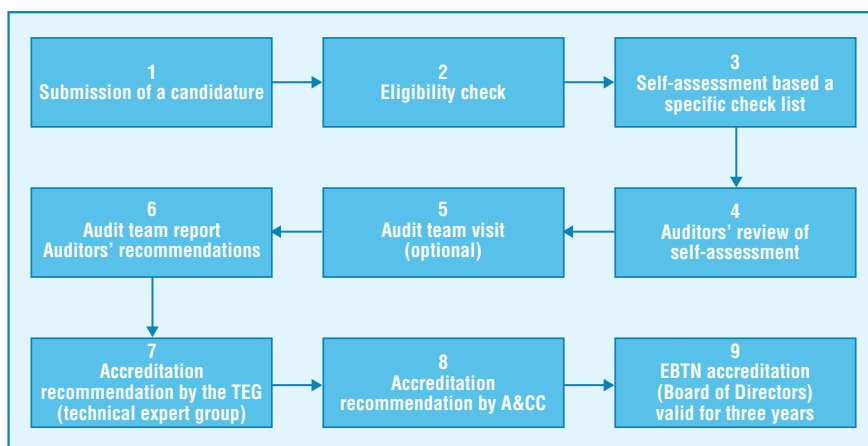
- the monetary-economic environment in which European banks operate;
- customer-product/service relationship;
- the fundamentals of marketing, management and ethics.

Source: Standard examination model (SEM), European bank training network (EBTN), 2004. Amended version March 2009, p. 2. Available from Internet: <http://www.ebtn.eu/index2.html> [cited 25.1.2011].

4.1.3. Accreditation of VET providers

As seen above, accreditation is strongly focused on the certification process, and therefore it should be seen only partly as accreditation of VET providers. All accreditations refer to a training programme resulting in a specific certificate, but the criteria refer to the examination and not to the design of the training programme.

Figure 7. Steps in the EBTN accreditation process



Source: Certified project, Proposed EBTN accreditation model, 2008 (adapted according to EBTN, 2009).

Training institutions should be EBTN members, for becoming accredited and this precondition can be considered a prestage for accreditation. The criteria for membership cover the economic and financial situation of the provider, the management capacity of the institution and the quality of training provision. EBTN members wishing to be accredited need to have expertise related to the financial services sector, expertise in delivering assessments and using the tools necessary for assessment of knowledge and experience based on defined learning outcomes.

4.1.3.1. *Criteria for accreditation*

Institutions asking for accreditation must provide evidence that they have:

- the capacity and ability to deliver certification;
- suitable staff with expertise for assessing applicants and able to supply details of staff recruitment, induction and development policies;
- a system for quality assurance in place that includes regular evaluation, review and updating of evaluation procedures;
- ability to deploy sufficient financial, technical and staffing resources to support evaluation of EBTN certificates;
- a system for storing information on EBTN certificates which ensures that candidate information is recorded, retained and managed appropriately;
- a process for evaluation including evaluation procedures, guidance, evidence gathering and an appeals procedure for candidates.

These requirements are supplemented with criteria referring to the examinations leading to the EBTN certificate:

- learning outcomes should be clearly stated and should be consistently integrated in the examination according to the defined standard examination model of the certificate;
- institutions should state how the assessment takes place including the conditions for evaluation, authentication, decision-making, reevaluation, reviewing and updating;
- institutions should state whether mentoring processes are used to allow candidates fully or partially to obtain an award, and they should also give the rationale for this;
- institutions should indicate how they intend to promote and implement approved certificates in ways that will support their sustainability.

Applicants get an elaborated standard examination model (SEM) as a guide for preparation and quality assurance of their examinations. The

model SEM was developed with 18 members from 16 European countries with support of the Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Union. All accredited institutions must follow the standards of the SEM. The SEM defines a standard examination format and an exam profile, including the type and number of questions, the number of alternatives per multiple choice question, the duration, procedure and schedule of the examination, the definition of scoring, the reliability and validity of the multiple-choice questions and the overall exam. The exam profile defines clusters of topics and subareas to be included in the exam, and their relative weight.

4.1.3.2. *Quality management*

EBTN's accreditation system refers to the common quality assurance framework (CQAF), which is at the basis of all EBTN's projects in quality assurance. Thus, quality management is a precondition for accreditation. Operation of an internal quality assurance system belongs to minimum requirements and provision of a self-evaluation report is part of the accreditation procedure.

The internal quality assurance system ensures that consistency is attained in evaluation of all certification programmes. The quality management system should document the roles and responsibilities of those involved in evaluation of programmes. Procedures should also outline how evaluation methods and materials are verified to ensure they are appropriate. The institution should provide evidence that it regularly reviews and strives to improve its quality assurance through an internal audit process. Quality assurance processes leading to recommendations for improvement should be accompanied by a subsequent action plan combined with a follow-up procedure to be implemented consistently.

Applicants for accreditation receive a questionnaire, which contains all relevant criteria and EBTN provides guidance during the application phase. To get accredited the institution must submit a complete application with the following documents enclosed:

- evidence of being an EBTN member or, if not, a responsible body of good standing and certified experience as a training provider in the financial services sector;
- evidence of their identity, formal structure, ownership, legal standing, aims and objectives;
- evidence of their internal and external quality assurance system;
- concerning final examinations of trainees, the institution has to provide documentation on their content, duration, methods, location, language, facilities and evaluation applied.

Duration of the accreditation process depends on how well the self-evaluation report was done and on matching the given criteria. It can take from some weeks to some months. Site visits by an audit team are optional, only if deemed necessary. Accreditation is valid for three years.

4.1.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

Based on a proposal from the A&CC, the Board of Directors can grant accreditation, grant accreditation subject to certain conditions in a certain time span, or reject it. The applying body will be informed of the decision and the reasons. If the criteria have not been fulfilled, they are informed of what should be changed and they are free to submit their application again after improving what was asked for. Up to now all applicants have been successful but not all at the first attempt. EBTN publishes on its website the names of member organisations granted accreditation by the Board of Directors.

The quality label for the certifying institution is 'accreditation to deliver an EBTN certificate'. Accredited institutions can issue the EFCB (European foundation certificate in banking) to bank employees who have passed a qualifying examination. The certification is a real added value for the provider and provides a clear advantage in competition with other providers. For the trainee it may be an advantage to have acquired a European-wide recognised certificate from an accredited training institution when applying for a job in another European country.

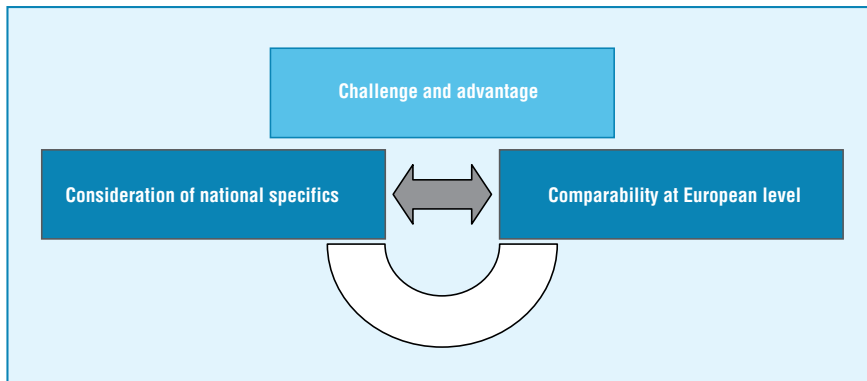
4.1.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

The accreditation system was implemented to improve the quality of the VET system and is intended to contribute to improved quality culture in the sector. Accreditation in the banking and financial services sector refers to a certain section of the provider's activity only, namely examination of trainees according to a European-wide applied standard examination model. Accreditation makes sure that issued certificates are based on exams that meet these quality standards. Nevertheless, professional experience, serious management and other dimensions of sound management as well as quality assurance in the provider's institution are preconditions for accreditation, too. Therefore successful accreditation can be used as a quality attribute in the institution's marketing and competition policy.

To be accredited training providers have to respect certain standard rules, but they have at the same time flexibility to adjust the content of courses and exams to their national reality. Exams are only partly translated into English (as a random sample) because of translation costs. This balance

between national flexibility and European-wide comparability of standards can be seen as a particular strength of the model.

Figure 8. **Keeping the balance**



The possibility to compare the levels of exams from different countries is highly appreciated and the added value in EFCB certification is particularly important for providers from new EU Member States. In countries with elaborated certification systems (such as the Netherlands or Germany) institutions are reluctant to apply for EBTN certificates. In these countries EBTN accreditation is relevant only for big institutions with international business relations.

It is planned to enlarge the accreditation and certification system to other qualifications and to focus more on testing competences.

4.2. European computer driving license (ECDL)

4.2.1. VET Context

ECDL (European computer driving licence) and ICDL (international computer driving licence) are two global standards in end-user computer skills certification within the ICT sector. The roots of this quality standard in ICT date back to 1995, when the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS) created a task force to examine how to raise ICT skills levels in industry throughout Europe. Work of the task force was supported by funding from the European Commission through the Esprit research programme. The task force identified the Finnish computer driving licence as

a potentially suitable model and after some modifications the new concept, named European computer driving licence (ECDL), gained European-wide acceptance. In January 1997, the ECDL Foundation was launched, as a central coordinating body to ensure that ECDL is implemented at an equal standard throughout Europe, and subsequently throughout the world.

The ECDL Foundation, registered in Ireland, is the worldwide governing body and licensing authority for ECDL and ICDL. The Foundation owns the intellectual property rights to the ECDL/ICDL concept and works actively to implement it. The Foundation promotes at European and international levels certification of ICT competences, with particular focus on end-user competences: basic information technology knowledge, operative systems, word processing, databases, calculation spreadsheets, presentation and web. This is done through licence agreements between ECDL Foundation and organisations in individual countries.

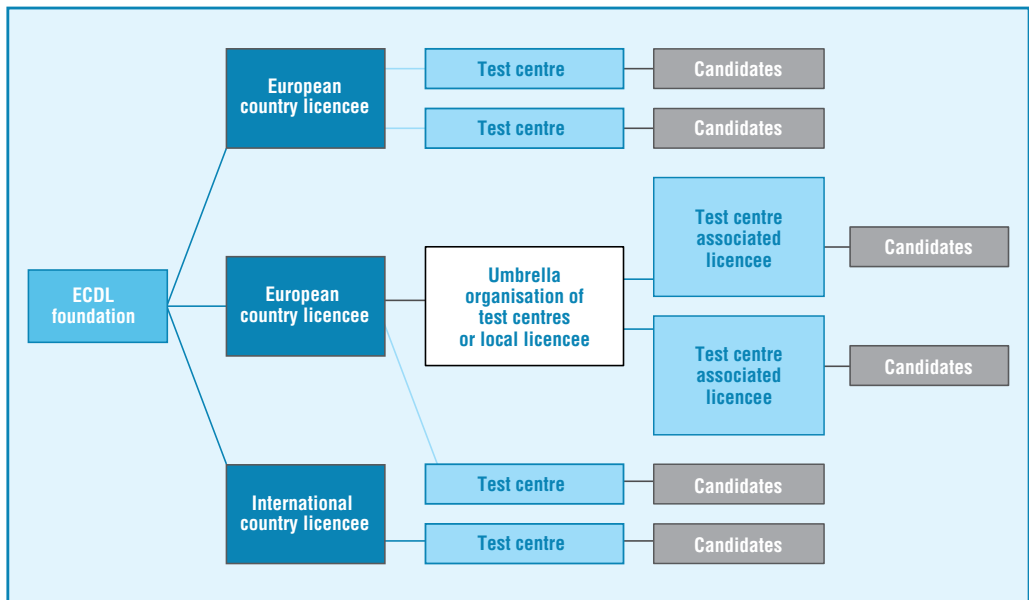
In the ECDL system we find two different levels of accreditation: the first is from the ECDL Foundation to country licencees, the second is from licencees to test centres, sometimes passing through an umbrella organisation:

- licencees are organisations chosen at country level by the ECDL Foundation. Licencees' primary mission is to find and accredit test centres where candidates will test their knowledge and competences of ECDL's themes to obtain an ECDL/ICDL certificate. In principle there is one licencee for every European country but some European countries share the same licencee;
- licencees' secondary mission is to approve training documentation edited by distributors respecting the syllabus outline. This didactical support can be used by candidates in autonomy or by training centres for offering in class training. The syllabus contains the topics that are the object of the ECDL test. In some countries, like Greece for instance, the syllabus has to be approved by the competent national training authority that supervises an important part of the process;
- in some countries test centres interact with the country licencee through a single organisation called an umbrella organisation of test centres or local licencee. Normally this organisation is an experienced test centre, which can offer support to the accreditation process at the centre of its network – when accredited, they become associated test centres or associated licencees;
- test centres can be schools, universities, training centres, non-profit associations. They are locations where candidates will test their knowledge and competences on ECDL's themes to obtain an ECDL/ICDL certificate.

For the licensee, test centres have to contract and provide candidates with an automatic testing and evaluation system (ATES), an automatic system for managing the ECDL test. The test covers basic computer skills and use of common applications at the workplace, at home and in society in general. It is divided into seven modules, six practical ones and one theoretical. A test in each module must be passed before the ECDL is awarded.

Further, test centres must purchase from the licensee a contractually predefined number of skills cards for a specific period of time, which they resell to candidates. When candidates register for the ECDL test, they buy their personal paper skills card on which their progress through the seven tests is recorded. Skills cards can be purchased at every accredited test centre. When the candidate has completed successfully all seven modules, the European computer driving licence (ECDL) is awarded. Figure 9 is a brief outline of the ECDL organisation.

Figure 9. ECDL – Organisational chart



There are several approved providers – distributors – who produce materials for teaching and learning the knowledge and skills assessed in the ECDL test. Approved vendors of such material are authorised to use a certified logo. Candidates are not required to do any training to pass

the ECDL test. If they are competent in the contents, they can contact an accredited ECDL test centre, purchase a skills card and perform the tests. Training centres and trainers are free to develop their own training materials, but they must ensure that all items of the test are covered.

4.2.2. Accreditation system

It is important to note that the ECDL accreditation system does not cover the training part but is focused on testing only. Even if test centres prepare their candidates, for example by traditional classroom training, for the ECDL test, these training activities are not subject to quality assurance and accreditation.

Focus of the ECDL accreditation system is purely to guarantee the correctness and transparency of the testing phase, which is to assess candidates' abilities independently from their training. Nevertheless, the ECDL system can certainly be considered an approach for the transfer and dissemination of quality elements and as an example of a widespread quality mark implemented by a strongly centralised and complex organisational structure.

4.2.3. Accreditation of test centres

The main procedural steps in recognition of test centres are formal approval procedures. No standard criteria are applied, but an evaluation of the appropriate elements for providing the ECDL test is made. Thus, first and above all the criteria for accreditation of test centres serve to guarantee correctness of the ECDL test phase.

It is important that the organisation applying to be recognised as a test centre is financially stable and that its location is suitable. The test centre must be located in a central zone or in a zone easy to reach. It must be indicated with a clear external label. Also, the test centre must be exclusively used by the accredited organisation: the testing room cannot be shared with another training provider.

The test centre must have appropriate facilities in place to run ECDL tests and keep appropriate records. There must be a suitable testing room, with the ATES system installed, a certain distance between the monitors and a locked cabinet with the coordinators' computer for keeping soft copies of records in security.

Every test centre must have an ECDL manager and at least two ECDL assessors with a certification from the licensee. The ECDL manager has to have a stable relationship with the organisation (as employee, partner, holder) and external consultants are not admitted. It is responsible for implementation of the contractual quality procedures. A specific expertise in ICT training and education is not mandatory but strongly recommended. The

ECDL assessors' general requirements must be submitted to the licensee in a curriculum format. Assessors must have one year of experience in ICT training and a degree in mathematics, physics, engineering or ICT. Other degrees can be considered only if assessors possess their own ECDL certificate. In addition they have to attend a 20-hour online course called 'ECDL forum'. This course aims at guaranteeing a high standard of test procedures. Assessors have to know very well the quality procedure and the ATES system. After successful approval their names will be added to a public list on the licensee's website.

Finally, a three-year legal agreement is signed and the new test centre is committed to purchase 90 skills cards over this period. The accreditation process lasts between 15 days to six weeks.

The test centre is not required to run an internal quality management system, but it must adopt the quality standards that apply to ECDL test activities.

4.2.3.1. *Process of accreditation*

The processes of accreditation differ slightly in different countries. To illustrate the differences and common elements, examples from Ireland and Italy are presented.

Good practice example: ECDL in Ireland

Irish example: ICS skill, Irish licensee

Step 1: Provider completes and submits an application form

Step 2: ICS skills accreditation officer checks form, contacts applicant and where necessary asks for additional documentation, e.g. letter from the bank

Step 3: Applicant pays the accreditation fee and signs a contract for three years

Step 4: A regional advisor carries out an accreditation audit at the premises of the applicant

Step 5: The regional advisor approves the accreditation audit

Step 6: The applicant is included in the ICS skills administration system and accounts

Step 7: The first batch of 30 skills cards is issued to the test centre

Good practice example: ECDL in Italy

Italian example: AICA, Italian licensee

Step 1: Provider forwards own data to the AICA licensee

Step 2: Provider submits self-declaration according to the test centre's requirement document

Step 3: Provider forwards mandatory documentation according to the criteria for accreditation

Step 4: Provider forwards optional documentation, such as ISO certification or associations' certificate of public acknowledgement and inscription on the list of providers authorised to receive public funding

Step 5: Accreditation manager examines the request and, in case of doubts, requires an opinion from the quality committee that can decide whether to send an inspector for a support visit (see below. If case of a negative evaluation, the request may be permanently or temporarily rejected)

Step 6: Provider signs the contract that formalises the accreditation process

In both the Irish and Italian cases, the country licensee is responsible for the accreditation and it evaluates the request. However, it can request, at a second stage, the opinion of the ECDL quality manager and the quality committee.

A site visit during the accreditation process is not mandatory, and is up to the different licensees to support an applicant. Support from licensees can be provided through inspectors or regional advisors or through an umbrella organisation of test centres. This is a consultant activity to make requests for accreditation clear, to help an applicant prepare the correct documentation to submit to the licensee. Usually, there is specific training (e-learning and training on the job) for the inspector and regional advisors and a three-day refresher course is provided every second year.

Following accreditation two audit activities take place, the compliance visit, without notice for the purpose of control, and a visit with notice for the purpose of support. In these cases some recommendations will be released. The compliance visit is part of the contractual quality procedure and its main goal is to verify ECDL test sessions and maintenance of the initial quality requirements. An important element of the compliance visit is analysis of statistical results of the test sessions, percentage of failed tests, or collection of indications about the proficiency and efficiency of the organisation, etc. In case of non-compliance corrective actions are to be taken. These actions have to be implemented immediately in order not to invalidate accreditation renewal.

4.2.3.2. *Internal quality management*

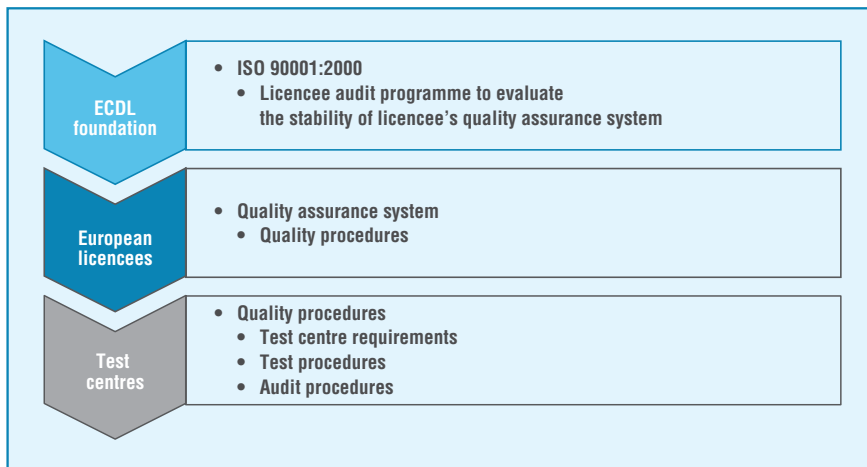
Within the ECDL Foundation, a quality management system has been established, making sure that all internal activities are carried out effectively, efficiently, and with continuous improvement. The cornerstone of this quality management system is the quality policy of the organisation. In 2005, the quality management system of the foundation was certified as being compliant with the internationally-recognised ISO 9001:2000 standard.

Through its licensee audit programme the ECDL Foundation transfers its quality standards to licensees. The foundation uses this specific tool to evaluate results of licensees' activity and stability of their quality management system every two years, and presents the licensee with a quality protocol. Unfortunately, the contents of this procedure are not made public, so is impossible to gain more information. The licensee audit programme is supervised by a quality assurance committee (QAC), which meets quarterly. The QAC is made up of permanent ECDL Foundation staff as well as several licensee representatives. The quality framework and its procedures are

mandatory for licencees and they are contractually assumed, but having a quality management system is not mandatory for test centres.

Licencees' transfer of quality to test centres is carried out through three specific procedures added to the contract: the test centre requirements, the testing procedure and the audit procedure. Having a complete quality management system is not mandatory for a test centre, but, if it is to become an accredited one, it must possess specific logistic and knowledge requirements and must respect test and audit procedures.

Figure 10. **Quality assurance in the ECDL system**



4.2.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

For test centres the ECDL accreditation system contributes to their economic and professional stability. By making use of the ECDL brand logo they can strengthen their position in the CVET market. Their main obligations are the number of skills cards they have to purchase for their candidates and maintenance of quality standards and procedures for the EDCL test. Concretely, they have to provide an adequate testing room and apply an automatic testing and evaluation system to manage the test.

Trainees are free to prepare themselves for the test. The accreditation system guarantees both quality of the test and transparency of the testing procedure. By passing the test they will receive a European-wide recognised certificate stating that they have acquired clearly-defined competences and skills and that this qualification is highly recognised on the labour market.

Since each licensee is the only accreditation body for a certain country, licensees are in a monopoly situation and also the only ones to provide test centres with ECDL skill cards.

4.2.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

The most striking economic feature of the ECDL accreditation system lays in selling skills cards to the trainees. The accredited test centre has to buy these cards from the foundation irrespective of local demand, which implies a certain financial risk if there is no or very little demand. However, the mandatory number of skills cards to be bought is limited.

An economic benefit for accredited training providers relates to their positioning in the market, since their accreditation guarantees them a certain exclusiveness as test centres and allows them to sell skills cards to interested students/trainees.

For the foundation, this system represents a content-related benefit also since being in constant contact with the test centres, it gathers their experience and suggestions on how to develop/adapt further tests to the needs of the sector and the people working in it. Issues currently under development relate to further efficiency of the administration system and the automated testing system for test centres.

So far, licensees have not been asked by the foundation to install procedures for monitoring the training process or to implement self-assessment. However, inclusion of training delivery in accreditation requirements is currently under discussion because of the obvious correlation between quality of the training process and good test results.

4.3. Hotels and restaurants sector

4.3.1. VET Context

The hotels and restaurants sector ⁽⁴⁴⁾ forms the backbone of European tourism, which is one of the key industries for the European economy; in terms of

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Within the European Union, the statistical classification of economic activities known as NACE rev. 1.1 is normally used for describing an economic sector or branch. Following these guidelines, the hotels and restaurants sector can be divided into three subsectors: (a) hotels, (b) restaurants, (c) canteens and catering (Eurofound and Oxford Research 2009, p. 6). The proposal for a revised NACE (rev. 2.0) submitted in 2006 envisages a two-subsector approach dividing the sector into a subsector 'Accommodation' and a subsector 'Food and beverage service activities'. This study is based on a two-subsector approach still using the terms 'Hotels' and 'Restaurants' with the latter including canteens and catering.

turnover, the hotels and restaurants sector accounts for more than 70% of the EU tourist sector (Eurofound and Oxford Research, 2009, p. 5). As a 'highly labour intensive service sector' (ibid., p. 5), it employs more than nine million people who work in 1.6 million enterprises ⁽⁴⁵⁾. The sector is dominated by female workers ⁽⁴⁶⁾; more than 70% of the jobs are full-time (Hotrec, 2008, p. 2; Eurofound and Oxford Research, 2009, p. 30). Compared with other sectors, the hospitality sector has a complex internal structure and is characterised by a very high level of diversity.

In the hotels and restaurants sector there is a wide range of occupations in several subsectors and on different educational levels. Either people with no or low formal educational level as well as highly skilled managers managing international hotel chains for example, can enter the sectoral labour market. The sector belongs to the so-called 'less knowledge-intensive services' and is often classified as a 'low skills industry'; the share of employees with tertiary education is far less in the hotels and restaurant sector compared to the total economy. In 2008, 40% of the workers were low-skilled, an indication of the sectors' important role for social inclusion (Hotrec, 2008, p. 2). Entering the labour market in the sector is considerably easier than in most sectors due to the few requirements of personnel's educational levels in many trades.

In general, the low skills and educational level of the labour force working in the hotels and restaurants sector (Baum, 2002) represents a major challenge for it. Due to European integration and international tourism, a growing variety of international customers is to be served successfully and employees should have the corresponding skills and qualifications especially in health and safety standards, respect of the protection of the environment and of sustainability which become increasingly important in this sector, too.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has highlighted the need for quality improvement of the education and training system in the sector. Many tourism education and training systems are rigid and static as they continue to respond to principles inherited from the past and have a very limited capacity to deal with essential strategic issues. Scarcity of human resources prepared to meet the challenge of the dynamic and demanding tourism market has led to proliferation of specialised courses in different areas of tourism, at various academic levels and given by diverse entities and organisations.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Over 92% of enterprises employ less than 10 people (Hotrec, 2008, p. 2).

⁽⁴⁶⁾ About 55% of workers are women (Hotrec, 2008, p. 2).

This phenomenon has caused a visible dispersion of efforts and an enormous fragmentation in training supply, aggravated by absence of standardisation of the different degrees given at international level and of uniform accreditation processes.

European sectoral umbrella organisations focus on improvement of quality of service in hospitality enterprises ⁽⁴⁷⁾. However, a fully implemented model for accreditation of training in this sector and at European level has not been identified ⁽⁴⁸⁾. We chose to focus on an American accreditation model which has been applied for many years in many European countries.

4.3.2. Accreditation system and accreditation bodies

The licensing and certification system developed and provided by the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AH&LEI) is applied in more than 50 countries throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. It refers to IVET as well as to CVET ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The AH&LEI is a non-profit member of the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AH&LA). The AH&LEI does not describe itself as an accreditation body. It offers educational institutions the opportunity to get a licence and work as an affiliate using standardised education programmes and learning material developed and provided by the AH&LEI. The certification system is based on certain quality standards, affiliates have to comply with.

If accreditation is understood as an evaluation tool applied not by VET providers themselves but by an external body officially recognised for this task, the AH&LEI's position becomes clear. Considering that the AH&LEI validates competences

⁽⁴⁷⁾ At present there is a great deal of discussion about quality assurance in the hotels and restaurants sector. In autumn 2005, all 37 national hotels and restaurants associations in Europe agreed on a common scheme for evaluation and classification of national, regional and enterprise-specific quality management systems. The so called 'European hospitality quality scheme' (EHQ) should be an umbrella quality scheme for national quality schemes and quality schemes of hotel chains established in several EU countries. This scheme is meant to be used as a reference model at European level on voluntary basis. The umbrella scheme is not intended to replace quality schemes, which already exist at national and regional levels, but it proposes a system for evaluating them to improve quality of services in the hospitality sector. The Hungarian 'Q' is the second national quality scheme to be recognised at European level, after the Swiss 'Q'. For more information, see: IHA, 2007, 2008.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ In the last years, a trend for standardising and harmonising some qualifications, education and training subsystems in the hotels and restaurants sector can be observed. In the framework of a Leonardo da Vinci project coordinated by the Finnish National Board of Education, transnational partners developed a model based on EFQM and balance scorecard for selected professions of the hotels and restaurants sector. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2006).

⁽⁴⁹⁾ For more information on AH&LEI, see <http://www.ei-ahla.org/>.

in 45 hospitality industry positions ⁽⁵⁰⁾ and works together with more than 90 licensed affiliates in 54 countries around the world, it becomes obvious that the institute defines standards for VET providers and that the training, qualifications and certification system offered by the AH&LEI is widely accepted.

According to AH&LEI its mission is ‘to be the premier source for quality hospitality education, training, and professional certification, serving the needs and advancing the excellence of hospitality schools and industries worldwide’.

The AH&LEI offers two international certification and training programmes:

- the international certification system for the hospitality education programme (HEP) implemented in over 60 countries, among them several Member States of the European Union ⁽⁵¹⁾;
- the global academic programme (GAP) set up in August 2009, by 49 institutions from 24 countries acting as licensed affiliates, and within international certification. The activities of the AH&LEI are supervised by the AH&LA board which consists of 83 members, most of them representing federal States. In addition to voting members, some organisations participate as advisors to the board. Among these organisations several are associations and societies with an international scope of activities ⁽⁵²⁾.

4.3.3. Accreditation of VET providers

The AH&LEI has defined the conditions and procedures for becoming a licensed affiliate to provide courses which offer worldwide recognised qualifications ⁽⁵³⁾. The intention is to make sure that all countries involved apply the requirements uniformly. According to the information delivered during an interview with the Brussels Business Institute (BBI), a VET provider interested in getting a licence should buy the programme from AH&LEI. It was underlined that the fields the licence agreement would cover (number of programmes, city, region or countries) would be defined considering the economic and financial situation of the provider, too.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ There is a wide range of trades at line-level as well as on supervisory and management levels. The hospitality skill certification includes programmes for 19 line-level positions for food and beverage staff, guest service staff and housekeeping staff and 27 programmes for executives, managers, supervisors, teaching staff, etc.

⁽⁵¹⁾ For the list of countries, see: <http://www.ahlei.org/schoolHepGap.aspx?id=1510> [cited 16.3.2011].

⁽⁵²⁾ These are for example: the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIA), the International Society of Hospitality Consultants (ISHC) and the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA).

⁽⁵³⁾ The following description is based on Internet and document research as well as on the example of the Brussels Business Institute (BBI) which acts as a licensed affiliate in Belgium and Luxembourg. More information is available on the institute’s website: <http://www.bbi-edu.eu>.

VET providers have to implement programmes according to standards defined by the AH&LEI. The adequacy of training facilities is proved by an external audit company during a site visit. There is no evidence that implementation of a QMS is a prerequisite for being licensed by the AH&LEI.

One of the most significant characteristics of the AH&LEI licensing system refers to the qualification of staff to act as trainers of staff at the work place. According to the qualification and certification system under consideration, there are two training programmes with two levels each for staff interested in teaching others. Persons looking for work as trainers can become either certified hospitality trainers (CHT) or certified hospitality department trainers (CHDT), certified hospitality educators (CHE) or certified hospitality instructors (CHI). To this effect, they have to take part in a three-day workshop which offers intensive, interactive learning exercises, the latest global principles and skills that provide the best educational experience for hospitality students.

The hospitality certificate and lapel pin

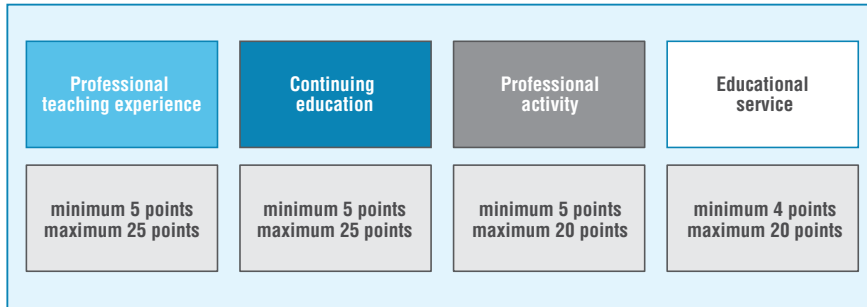
At the end of the workshop, participants have to pass a certification exam (including a video presentation). Candidates who pass the exam receive a renowned hospitality-professional designation, a CHT, CHDT, CHE or CHI certificate, plaque and lapel pin.



Certificates are valid for five years. At the end of this period, trainers and educators are expected to take part in a recertification process based on the maintenance point system. To maintain their professional status candidates need 50 points every five years. AH&LEI provides detailed description of the criteria for recertification and the ways applicants can earn these points. There is a range of activities to qualify applicants for renewal of points. For example, the CHE maintenance point system includes four categories. For each, a range of credit points is defined and applicants should gain a minimum and maximum respectively. So the four categories can be considered as relatively equal regarding their value as requirements within the CHE maintenance point system⁽⁵⁴⁾. Figure 11 gives an overview of these categories and their value points.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Comparing the CHE with the CHT system, there are some differences regarding minimum points and the number and status of categories.

Figure 11. **Categories of the CHE maintenance point system (AH&LEI)**



Source: Compiled from AH&LEI (2007). *The CHE maintenance overview and CHE maintenance activity report*. Available from Internet: <http://www.ahlef.org/uploadedFiles/EI/certification/Recertification/CHE.pdf> [cited 24.1.2011].

A range of activities is attached to every category, valued by a certain number of points which are different for the different activities. Further, in this system both indicators and documentation requirements are defined. Figure 12 shows some examples.

Based on such charts applicants can evaluate on their own their qualification status and chances for successful recertification. For this purpose they can use several documents offered by AH&LEI like the CHE maintenance activity report they have to fill in and the CHE activity verification copy master. Every activity should be documented and confirmed by an official (for example, the employer) or by an official document (for example, a certificate of attendance). The maintenance activity report is approved by AH&LEI's professional certification department. Where activities or attached documents listed by applicants in their report are falsified their professional hospitality or certification will be revoked.

Based on the data available, the approach of the licensing system provided by AH&LEI is primarily focused on input quality (training of staff, training material) and process quality (training process, teaching methods) of vocational education and training.

The duration of the licensing process by AH&LEI is approximately six months. The licence is valid for five years and has to be renewed every five years based on a report VET providers have to draft. It is important to underline that the qualification of teaching staff is reexamined every five years as well.

Figure 12. AH&LEI’s CHE maintenance point system (abridgement)

Category	Activity	Points	Specifics	Documentation
Professional teaching experience	Full time teaching and/or administrating	5 points per year	Must be a full-time teacher and/or administrator of a hospitality/tourism programme of an LEI approved academic institution	Statement of employment verification from personnel or human resources official, or from immediate academic supervisor
Continuing education	Completion of a of a graduate course	5 points per course	Must earn passing grade	Copy of report indicating course title and grade obtained
	Industry work experience (Line-level)	1 point for every 30 days of employment, minimum of 8-hour work day	Employed by a hospitality or tourism business	Statement of employment verification, including work dates and hours per day
Professional activity	Attendance at educational or industry-related professional trade show, conference, or convention	1 point for each show, conference, or convention	An approved professional organisation	Statement of verification specifying sponsor, date of activity, and location
Educational service	Author of a book	15 points per book	Author or co-author	Copy of book’s cover and publisher page
	Panellist for an educational or industry-related event	1 point per panel	Panel activity of at least 30 minutes duration	Verification statement specifying sponsor, topic, time, length of panel presentation

Source: Extract from AH&LEI (2007). *The CHE maintenance point system*. Available from Internet: <http://www.ahlef.org/uploadedFiles/EI/certification/Recertification/CHE.pdf> [cited 24.1.2011].

4.3.4. Results and impacts of licensing/accreditation

Candidates who meet all criteria defined by AH&LEI become licensed affiliates and therefore they sign a formal licence agreement. The licence covers a specific range of training programmes (for example HEP or GAP international licence). It is guaranteed that the certified institute can use the educational institute’s name and registered marks.

Institutions which successfully complete AH&LEI’s HEP international licensing process obtain the exclusive right within a protected territory (city, country or multiple countries) to:

- offer LEI's individual course certificates, areas of specialisation and diplomas in a classroom or distance learning environment;
- market and distribute LEI products at discount prices;
- train and certify faculty members/eligible employees.

VET providers can promote their services by emphasising that the courses respond to the most recent developments and trends in the hospitality sector as all guidelines and training material are regularly updated ⁽⁵⁵⁾. In addition, VET providers may profit from AH&LEI's research and networking activities.

Further, AH&LEI highlights some privileges and benefits for institutions with a GAP international licence, such as to:

- offer LEI courses, areas of specialisation, and diplomas;
- use LEI name and trademark;
- use a full range of proven, up-to-date educational materials and supplementary materials;
- be flexible in defining the class size and meeting times.

Those institutions which hold an exclusivity agreement have a strong competitive edge at regional or national levels. Trainees get training according to the current state and modern trends in the hospitality sector. Obtaining an international well-known certificate increases their job mobility and labour market perspectives.

The licensing system contributes to development of structures as it offers an array of training programmes in different trades built upon one another or complementary to one another. VET providers can select the programmes they deem most appropriate or relevant for the regional or national market and can purchase the respective licences. Further, licensing assures compliance with certain quality standards (for example, with regard to learning and teaching materials and staff requirements, etc.).

4.3.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

The main objective of the system is to improve quality in hospitality training and education. Becoming certified or licensed at international level, VET providers can strengthen their position in the market. To assure quality of training, AH&LEI offer VET providers a wide range of training and evaluation material regularly revised and updated.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ For example, in the 2009-10 catalogue, a couple of renewed and new courses were included. See AH&LEI, 2009, p. 2, 6, 10-13, 22, 24, 25, 28, etc.

As current research reveals there is still a strong need for improving the educational system because of its decisive impact on sector development. However, and despite the trend for higher quality which could add value to the sector, the prevailing state of education is evaluated as a weak point that can jeopardise the sector quality.

It can be assumed that institutions like AH&LEI and others will focus their efforts on further extending existing certification and quality assurance systems. New training programmes will be developed to meet new professional requirements defined by the hospitality industry.

Since there is no global label, training providers are forced to get as many as possible to raise their reputation. This trend is also observed in the sector itself, where hotels and restaurants are competing with one another in getting as many stars and other distinctions as possible.

At European level, there is a need for a quality debate focused not only on how to evaluate and improve quality of service in hotels, restaurants and canteens but also on how to improve the quality of VET in this sector. Increasing awareness of sectoral umbrella organisations of this need could be beneficial.

4.4. Welding sector

4.4.1. VET Context

Welding technology is applied in different production processes of various industries. As a cross-sector technology, welding and related technologies are very important for the global economy. In 2007, 1.08 million people worked in welding and related technologies in Europe alone (DVS, 2009, p. 13)) and the European joining industry generated industrial goods of a value of EUR 7.8 billion (Moos, 2008, p.2) Current research reveals that the European market share in joining technology supplies amounts to one third of world markets (DVS, 2009, p. 12).

Already in 1948, welding institutes and societies of 13 countries had joined forces and created the International Institute of Welding (IIW). The underlying intention was to 'make possible more rapid scientific and technical progress' (Quintino and Ferraz, 2004, p. 3). Nowadays, the IIW describes its mission as 'to act as the worldwide network for knowledge exchange of joining technologies to improve the global quality of life' ⁽⁵⁶⁾ and pursues the following main objectives ⁽⁵⁷⁾ to:

⁽⁵⁶⁾ See the mission statement of IIW at: <http://iiw-iis.org/TheIIW/Pages/default.aspx> [cited 21.3.2011].

⁽⁵⁷⁾ See: <http://iiw-iis.org/TheIIW/ObjectivesAndGoals/Pages/Default.aspx> [cited 21.3.2011].

- identify, create, develop and transfer best practices for sustainable development in a sustainable environment;
- identify, develop and implement IIW education, training, qualification and certification programmes globally;
- promote IIW and its member societies and services in various regions of the world for the common benefit of all.

Implementation of the training, qualification and certification system for welding personnel started in Europe in 1995. Since 1998 according to the cooperation agreement, this system has been transferred to IIW 'to promote global expansion' (Quintino et al., 2008, p. 5). Later, the intention of the European Welding Foundation (EWF) ⁽⁵⁸⁾ was to design training courses that 'can form a basis for lifelong learning and professional promotion for personnel working in welding technology' (Quintino et al., 2008, p. 6).

Nowadays, welding is confronted with fast technological development as well as high environmental and health safety standards. Innovations in machine and tool technologies and application of new material are challenges welders have to meet consistently. So, welders have to undergo continuing training regularly to keep up with new technological standards. Otherwise they will lose their professional recognition and can no longer fulfil job requirements in this sector. To keep welders up to date, VET providers offer a wide range of continuing training courses including subjects like material technology and control, planning of the working process, and quality assurance. Further, welders can choose upgrading training courses. This system of continuing and upgrading training consists of modules, many complementing one another. In the German welding sector, for example, continuing and upgrading training courses can be offered only by authorised training bodies.

Initial vocational education and training (IVET) for the welding sector is regulated by national education systems ⁽⁵⁹⁾. Thus, accredited VET providers offer mainly continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Efforts of EWF and IIW to establish an internationally-harmonised training system in the welding sector are restricted to CVET.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Nowadays, the acronym EWF stands for European Federation for Joining, Welding and Cutting.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ 'Access to harmonised courses [harmonised by EWF and IIW] is allowed only to those individuals who possess an appropriate agreed level of general technical education, equivalent but different for each country as these are based on national education systems.' (Quintino et al., 2008, p. 5).

4.4.2. Accreditation system and accreditation bodies

In the welding sector, there is a well-defined institutional framework for accreditation agreed by international and European sectoral umbrella organisations. At international level, IIW established the International Authorisation Board (IAB). The IAB publishes guidelines for training syllabuses and examinations and implements the quality assurance system. The task of the IAB is not only to administer and implement the system but to develop it further. At national level, there is one organisation in each member country, which is responsible for supervising the training, qualifications and certification system of welding personnel. This is the Authorised National Body (ANB). The certification process for welding manufacturers is managed by the Authorised National Body for Company Certification (ANBCC)⁽⁶⁰⁾. The present study focuses on the international training, qualifications and certification system for welding personnel, established by EWF and IIW and implemented worldwide in many countries already.

ANBs are the national accreditation bodies responsible for evaluation and monitoring of VET providers (approved training bodies – ATBs), conduct of examinations, assessments of applicants for certification, diplomas and certificates. ANBs appointed by IAB should be recognised by the national IIW member society. For becoming an ANB, the applicant society has to be a member of the sectoral umbrella organisation and prepare documentation of its qualification system, to guarantee equivalent qualifications at both national and international levels. Transition arrangements have to be presented whenever a diverging national system is to be integrated into the international one. Evaluation of an application to become an ANB includes site visits by independent international experts. ANB accreditations are valid for five years following which accredited bodies have to pass through a reaccreditation process.

4.4.3. Accreditation of VET providers

Accreditation of VET providers in the welding sector sets the standards concerning the input side of quality of training services because it defines human and material requirements and foresees implementation of a quality management system. It also guarantees that all VET providers work with common framework curricula and use mandatory learning and teaching materials, for assuring quality of their VET offer adjusted to specific target

⁽⁶⁰⁾ The international company certification system developed by EWF and IIW is not relevant in the context of this study. It refers to companies that produce welding products and offers them a certification, which confirms that they meet the standard requirements with regard to quality, environment, health and safety.

groups according to regional demands. Finally, accreditation includes monitoring and evaluation of the training process and results.

The IAB has defined rules for implementation of the education, examination and qualification guidelines of welding personnel at provider level. The intention is to make sure that all countries involved apply the requirements uniformly. This is an important precondition for common recognition of the diplomas granted in several countries. The IIW guidelines define the minimum requirements for education and training, in terms of objectives, scope, expected results and recommended times as well as the rules for examination and qualification. The depth to which each topic should be dealt with is indicated in the guideline teaching by the number of hours allocated to it.

Access to the accreditation process presupposes confirmation of demand. In general, demand for training courses emanates from enterprises and employers interested in upskilling staff and are willing and able to bear the training costs. The potential applicant has to contact the national umbrella organisation to clarify the degree of demand in a certain region. Table 8 gives an overview of further criteria applied.

Table 8. Criteria for accreditation in the welding sector

Criteria to be fulfilled	Examples
Context-oriented criteria	proof of demand
Input-oriented criteria	personal requirements (names, qualifications and experience of staff), technical requirements, teaching material
Process-oriented criteria	training process, examination procedure, staff/student ratio, complaints procedure
Output-oriented criteria	number of certificates, customer satisfaction

Source: TWI Certification Limited (2002b).

In their application for accreditation providers have to indicate the qualifications and responsibilities of their management board. The material requirements for workshops and equipment are to be specified for different fields of technology. To get accredited, the applicant should submit the CVs of training staff, including authenticated current approval certificates for training. This constitutes a rare example where the qualifications of training staff are considered a major requirement for getting accredited. Further, VET providers have to carry out regular surveys of clients and participants at the end of the training process. Those who participate in the survey should give their feedback regarding learning conditions and quality of the training

process. So, VET providers get some information on positive and negative aspects to improve their offers. In addition, VET providers have to conduct interviews with representatives of enterprises who asked their employees to be trained.

Implementation of an internal quality management system is another prerequisite for accreditation, and the quality management handbook of VET providers also contains a description of the procedure to deal with customer complaints ⁽⁶¹⁾.

The German umbrella organisation offers a manual for quality management as a reference to VET providers. This describes the contents and aspects to be considered when implementing a quality management system (QMS). A specific QMS is not requested. During site visits, auditors check whether the QMS described by the VET provider is really in operation. The UK ANB requires implementation of a QMS and its documentation in a so-called control manual. Implementation of a QMS is a compulsory prerequisite for starting the accreditation process in the UK as well as in Germany.

The British ANB offers VET providers interested in certification special material for conducting a self-audit. Using this tool, providers can get well prepared for the formal evaluation. In these guidelines criteria and standards for running a training organisation in the welding sector are described in detail.

Process of accreditation

In Germany, VET providers find information on accreditation procedures and prerequisites on the webpage of the national umbrella organisation – DVS ⁽⁶²⁾. After passing the accreditation process successfully, applicants sign a framework contract with DVS envisaging 'to establish in joint responsibility a DVS® training centre in joining technologies and further develop practice-oriented continuing and further training for adaptation to technological developments' ⁽⁶³⁾. An overview of the procedural steps towards accreditation is provided in Figure 13.

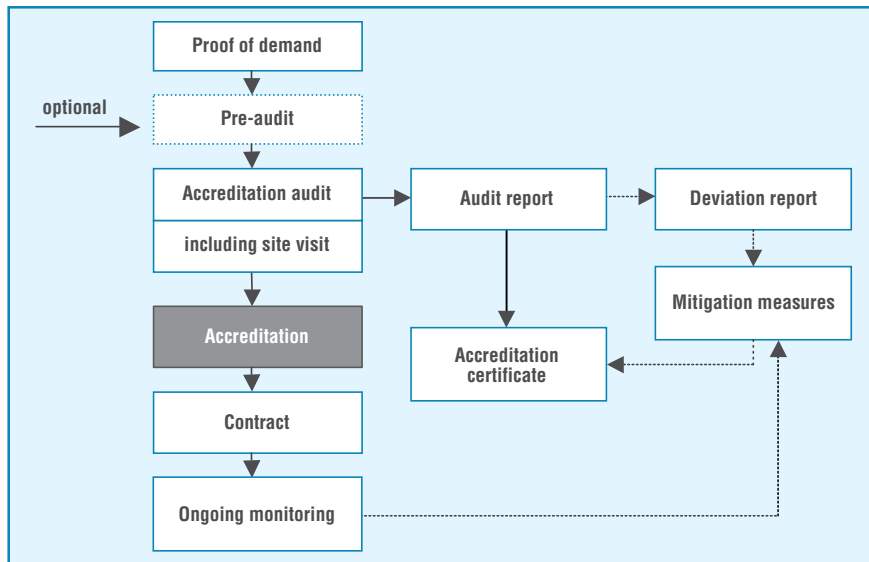
The time between the candidates' first expression of interest and their accreditation as an ATB varies between six months and one year.

⁽⁶¹⁾ First, the VET provider should try to solve the problem by its own means. If no result can be achieved, the examination and certification committee of the federal state or, after this, the main examination and certification committee will be involved in the problem-solving process.

⁽⁶²⁾ See: <http://www.dvs-media.eu/>.

⁽⁶³⁾ See DVS eV (2006). Rahmenvertrag des DVS – Deutscher Verband für Schweißen und verwandte Verfahren für die Anerkennung als DVS®-Bildungseinrichtung [DVS framework contract], p. 1. Available from Internet: http://www.die-verbindungs-spezialisten.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PersZerf/DVS_Rahmenvertrag.doc [cited 24.1.2011].

Figure 13. **Procedural steps for accreditation in the welding sector (Germany)**



Legend:

- Proof of demand: VET providers have to prove that there is demand in their region for the envisaged training services. To this end they have to agree with the regional DVS structures the geographical area and target group for the courses to cover. The explicit purpose of this requirement is to avoid unnecessary investments and to assure a balanced training offer.
- Pre-audit: candidates have also the opportunity to undergo a pre-audit with support from the ANB to prepare them for the official accreditation audit.
- Accreditation audit: in all cases, VET providers have to undergo an accreditation audit. The examination and certification body assesses whether the candidate disposes of the necessary human resources and infrastructure (premises, equipment). The audit is conducted by two experts, the quality manager of the ANB (who is an employee of the ANB) and an external auditor.
- Site visit: there are detailed guidelines for site visits. The auditors use checklists and questionnaires and observe real training sessions and examinations.
- Audit report: there are clear indications of which deviations are tolerable. In case of minor deviations candidates get specific instructions what to ameliorate. In case of major deviations the auditors do not recommend continuation of the accreditation process. In case the audit reveals deviations an additional deviation report is produced, which sets deadlines for fulfilment of the proposed mitigation measures. A contract is only concluded if and when the VET provider has completely implemented the mitigation measures requested in the report.
- Conclusion of contract: following successful accreditation the umbrella organisation and the VET provider conclude a contract, which specifies rights and obligations of both parties. For this purpose a common framework contract can be downloaded from the homepage of the umbrella organisation (http://www.die-verbindungs-spezialisten.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PersZert/DVS_Rahmenvertrag.doc [cited 16.3.2011]).
- Accreditation certificate: the certificate is issued by the ANB. The scope of the accreditation of training and evaluation measures is agreed upon jointly with the representation of the national umbrella organisation at State level (DVS-Landesverband) and the regional structures (DVS-Bezirksverband) and the ANBCC (DVSZert®).
- Ongoing monitoring following accreditation: membership of the national umbrella organisation implies VET providers agree to have their training courses regularly monitored by the national authorised body. Every two years, VET providers are visited by an audit team, which checks the ATB's activities by random sampling. Based on a risk/as-is analysis, auditors check if the VET providers still meet the defined quality criteria. In case of deviations they have to remedy them by fulfilling corresponding obligations.

Data and information on accredited VET providers are published on the website of the national umbrella organisation. The information comprises the contact details of the VET provider and their scope of activities (types of courses: full-time/part-time; courses according to qualifications issued, relation to national, European, and international guidelines).

4.4.4. Results and impacts of accreditation

Candidates who meet all accreditation criteria and have passed the audit procedure receive a certificate from the ANB confirming that the provider delivers services at a nationally established level of quality, disposes of all prerequisites in terms of staff, premises and equipment necessary for high quality training and undergoes regular internal and external reviews with regard to training and assessment services provided.

VET providers can market their services by stressing that the courses respond to the most recent technological developments and trends and that the qualifications they issue are recognised internationally. Through membership in the sector umbrella organisation, VET providers are part of information, communication and cooperation networks that enable rapid access to expertise, updated training material and internal exchange of experiences. They can use the name, logo and the high reputation of the national umbrella organisation for their promotion, an advantage in tendering for significant contracts. The certificate issued by the ANB can act as a door opener for new opportunities not only in regional and national markets but also in international training and education.

Further, implementation of a quality management system and site visits conducted by external specialists impact on the quality of the initial and continuing training courses offered by VET providers. Due to ongoing monitoring, VET providers care systematically for the quality of their training and examination facilities, procedures and results.

Trainees can be certain they get training according to the current state and modern trends of technology and science. Obtaining an internationally recognised qualification increases their job mobility and labour market perspectives. Since the whole training, qualification and certification system consists of several different qualification levels, which are permeable via a system of bridges and ladders, trainees are offered multiple opportunities of initial labour market integration, reintegration or promotion. At European and international levels, EWF and IIW publish regularly 'best practice experiences' in EWF/IAB newsletters. In issue 25, for example, two European best practice cases are described ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Available from Internet: http://www.ewf.be/media/newsletterDocs/doc_26_new_newsletter__25_web.pdf [cited 21.3.2011].

A proxy indicator for the value and reputation of the accreditation system in the welding sector could be the number of diplomas issued by EWF und IIW. The cumulated number of EWF diplomas amounted from fewer than 16 000 in 1995 to more than 100 000 in 2007, which indicates significant market penetration of the system. A similar development can be observed with regard to IIW diplomas, which amounted from 2 098 in 1999 to 43 029 in 2007 (Quintino et al. (2008, p. 8). In Germany, there are currently 388 VET providers accredited by DVS, which have to undergo a reaccreditation audit every two years. DVS conducts approximately 190 audits per year, of which approximately 95% are for reaccreditation and 5% for initial accreditation.

4.4.5. Evaluation of the accreditation system

In the welding sector European and the international umbrella organisations developed jointly an internationally-recognised accreditation system for the ‘international training, qualification and certification system for welding personnel’, which is currently implemented in 40 countries via an ANB. According to EWF/IAB these 40 ANBs have accredited more than 600 VET providers (ATB) so far.

The system is characterised by clear structures, a broad range of rules and regulations and ongoing further development. An early consultation on harmonisation at both European and international levels helped to avoid duplication of structures, procedures and financial burden.

Despite efforts of EWF/IIW to implement a common accreditation system, there are several procedures and criteria at national level that put a real burden on providers. Therefore the EWF requests that sectoral and national accreditation systems be harmonised. A possible solution to be promoted by the responsible authorities could be common recognition of certificates (IAB already recognises national certificates if they comply with the relevant ISO norms) and certain harmonisation of accreditation processes at national level.

Analytical comparison of findings

In this section a comparison of the analysed accreditation systems is provided. The national and sectoral systems are analysed according to objectives, quality frameworks in place, criteria applied in the accreditation process, relationships between accreditation and quality management of VET providers, and results achieved so far with accreditation.

5.1. Accreditation in VET – Current state of affairs

As stated in the methodological part of this study only countries and sectors having in place a framework for accreditation of VET providers were included. It will not come therefore as a surprise, that the institutional setting for accreditation has been established in all countries, whereas in UK/England, due to recent radical changes of the accreditation and inspection procedures, the newly created institutional framework has still to settle definitively. Hungary set up a new educational system following the political changes in 1989 making best use of the experiences of western European countries. Several quality improvement initiatives have been developed and implemented within the VET sector in recent decades, thus laying the ground for the current approach. Further, Hungary can serve as an example of the influence of European quality assurance initiatives at national level. Since 2005, several reviews have been carried out to improve the Hungarian system in line with European quality assurance guidelines (CQAF and EQARF).

Most accreditation systems analysed in this study are still in a developmental stage or just under (continuous) reorganisation. In Denmark and Romania accreditation is still in the process of implementation, but in both countries the achievements at European level have contributed quite strongly to the design of the pursued approach. In Denmark, the process started in 2008 only with accreditation of newly created training programmes in IVET. It will cover existing programmes and CVET only step by step. Romania has foreseen accreditation of VET providers and/or VET programmes. A two-step procedure consisting of authorisation and accreditation is available, but for most VET providers whether in IVET or CVET only authorisation, namely

the first step has taken place so far. In Italy, accreditation of VET providers in IVET and CVET is implemented by the autonomous regions and the system in the Lombardy region has been analysed as a case apart. This system went through several stages of development with different objectives and procedures and although stable and quite advanced, there is still a lot of experimentation with a benchmarking approach. In Germany, in the part of CVET under AZWV and France in both IVET and CVET, other criteria, procedures and instruments applied in accreditation are to be fine-tuned and shaped according to experiences made in recent years. This means that national approaches are under revision in most countries.

The situation is equally heterogeneous in sectoral approaches to accreditation in VET. Whereas in the banking and financial services sector the accreditation system is still at an infancy stage, the approaches applied in the welding sector and for ECDL are rather consolidated although they exist only since the last decade. It is interesting to note that European initiatives served as stimuli to all these sectoral systems and sometimes provided also the means to start a supranational, sector-based initiative for accreditation in VET. In the hotels and restaurants sector an accreditation system for VET providers developed in Europe and operating successfully could not be identified, although a sectoral initiative supported by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme had developed once a relevant system (Finnish National Board of Education, 2006). Unfortunately, this EU-supported model for accreditation of training programmes in this sector did not create sustainable effects. Therefore our analysis had to focus on a licensing model operated by an important American professional organisation.

5.2. Motivation for implementation of accreditation

In the past decade considerable efforts were made towards management and improvement of quality of training provision both in the countries and sectors examined here. This can be seen as a natural consequence of general concern for increasing transparency and competitiveness in European societies: growing attention paid to quality in vocational education and training at European and national levels and in certain sectors is partially driven by concern to deliver competitive training. Current interest is based on the conviction that only highly educated and best trained professionals will be able to deal with the complex demands of today's working life and with future challenges of economic, technological and social developments.

Accreditation is seen as one of the tools to assure quality in VET and thus to respond to these challenges.

While it can be stated that accreditation has become a standard in CVET across most EU Member States, the situation is profoundly different for IVET, where fewer national accreditation frameworks exist. In IVET, quality is assured primarily by regulation. According to results of the present study this is due to the different nature of State authorities' involvement in the two areas: since early 1990, CVET became an important industry with emerging market forces, whereas IVET is still mainly under the auspices of governmental bodies or part of a traditional corporative structure of State authorities and social partners.

Concerning IVET the following statement from Denmark is typical: 'In IVET there is a tradition of long and strong influence of trade unions and employer's associations. Therefore there has been no accreditation introduced, but approval resulting from assessment of all relevant stakeholders. Final approval is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.'

For CVET it can be observed that preconditions and developments in several countries are comparable to one another. In Hungary, an accreditation system for adult training (training outside the school system – CVET) was established in 2002 to ensure that in a market of providers public financing would reach only the best performing institutions. For this purpose a filter system was established based on quality assurance and guaranteeing training provision according to certain quality standards.

In Italy, since 1996 the training market opened to private institutions with the Treu law (197/96) and the need occurred to organise the market to assure the quality of training provision. At central level the guidelines for accreditation of VET providers were defined by ISFOL, and were then interpreted and implemented in different ways by the autonomous regions.

In Germany, as a result of reunification and changes in employment in the former German Democratic Republic, a CVET industry came into existence, which absorbed the huge amount of public money spent to retrain the labour force in eastern Germany. In 1997, a catalogue with standards for CVET providers was published, which obliged them to establish an internal system for self-evaluation. Since reform of labour market policy introduced with the 'Hartz laws' of 2002, CVET providers have to establish an internal quality management system and are subject to external accreditation as a precondition for having access to public funds.

For governance of the accreditation system in Germany and in Lombardy in Italy, it is important to underline that a substantial part of public funding

is no longer given directly to providers but to trainees in form of vouchers who can then choose on their own the provider with whom they would like to redeem their voucher. Only accredited providers can participate in the voucher system.

Both in Denmark and Romania developments in European educational policies have played a crucial role in shaping their accreditation system. Establishment of the Danish approach was driven by the Bologna process and achievements of the Copenhagen process, resulting in creation of the common quality assurance framework. The CQAF and its related tools are the building blocks of the Danish approach. Romania took European VET standards on board with the European quality assurance framework, when restructuring its VET system after 1989 and in view of becoming an EU Member State. In Hungary, European quality assurance initiatives had a considerable influence, too. Since 2005, Hungary has implemented several practical initiatives aiming at reviewing and further developing/improving its VET quality management system in line with European common quality assurance guidelines and criteria (CQAF and EQARF).

Thus, we can conclude that clearing the market from weak VET providers or obsolete VET programmes by assuring a minimum standard of quality giving thus a guarantee of quality to potential users of the training system, was the main reason for establishing accreditation schemes for CVET in the countries analysed. In France, motivation to create the quality label GretaPlus and an inherent accreditation scheme for public institutions active both in IVET and CVET was slightly different. Here, motivation was dictated by the intention to reform and adapt the structure of public training organisations to the growing diversity of customers' demands and to the needs of an emerging market – and finally to assure a certain CVET market share for public institutions. Despite recent changes in UK/England, the accreditation system functions 'across the board' with its strong emphasis on transparency, external inspection and reporting procedures.

With the *Lycée des Métiers* France introduced a quality label for public institutions in IVET, too, a rare but exemplary model of accreditation in IVET, which aimed to improve attractiveness of vocational education, strengthen its links to employment and encourage training organisations to shape their individual profiles and develop a quality culture. Both GretaPlus and LdM are voluntary, and they award State-regulated institutions an additional quality label. A labelling system is different to accreditation, but their procedures are comparable since successful accreditation is a precondition for obtaining a recognised quality label.

In conclusion, assuring quality in CVET and developing a national system for accreditation seem to be intrinsically linked to each other. They are due to diversification of customers' needs, both trainees and employers, they are driven by a growing European market for continuing VET and the presence of market forces in this area. Further, establishment of accreditation in particular schemes seems to be linked to a broad range of reforms, including redefinition of the relationship between CVET and labour market and other parts of education and training, and to establishing new, different modes of governance in the VET system, including partnerships and financing.

Most national accreditation schemes analysed in this study apply to IVET and CVET, and make use of very similar methods. This is the case in Italy, Romania and UK. In Germany, potential spillover of new modes of governance from CVET to IVET seems to be rather limited, as IVET, different to CVET, is much more enterprise-based and more strictly regulated by both the State and social partner organisations.

Motivations to build up sectoral accreditation systems differ from national ones although there are some preconditions that influence both. This is the case in the banking sector, where political changes in central and eastern Europe after 1989 and globalisation of markets and economy created increasing demand for standards and quality assurance at European level. Establishment of an accreditation system was aiming at harmonisation, visibility and comparability among banking training organisations from different countries. Offering European-wide acknowledged certificates should support employability and mobility of employees in the European financial services sector.

Motivation to create the ECDL accreditation system dates back to the 1990s and aims at raising ICT skills levels in industry throughout Europe and at promoting certification of ICT competences, with particular focus on end-user competences (basic information technology knowledge, operative systems, word processing, databases, calculation spreadsheets, web) according to equal standards.

The welding sector is confronted with fast technological development as well as with high environmental, health and safety standards defined either at European or global levels. Innovations in machine and tool technologies and application of new material are challenges welders have to meet consistently. The motivation to set up a sectoral accreditation system builds on the necessity for welders to undergo continuing training to keep up to date with new technological standards, otherwise they will lose their professional competences and may cause severe damage.

Compared to the other three sectors, the hotels and restaurants sector has a complex internal structure characterised by a very high level of diversity. The low labour qualifications in the hotels and restaurants sector cannot cope with the challenges the sector is confronted with (international tourism; a growing variety of international customers; new trends of a dynamic and demanding tourism market; health, safety and environmental standards). So there is a need for quality improvement of the education and training system.

To sum up, there are similar roots but different intentions for establishment of national and sectoral accreditation systems. National systems tend to regulate the market for (mainly continuing) training provision and are linked to various reforms of VET systems. By comparison, development of sectoral systems is more directly linked to coordinated delivery of skills and competences responding to European and international demands for qualified labour force, supporting thus employability and mobility of employees. The intention is to make sure that in all countries involved standard requirements for training apply uniformly, which is an important precondition for common recognition of granted certificates.

5.3. Quality frameworks

Ensuring quality through accreditation of VET providers and/or programmes is not just a technical process but presupposes definition of a (national, regional or sectoral) quality framework. As fundamental elements such a framework should have first clearly stated objectives for further development, which need to be continuously reviewed and adapted, according to experiences gained in technological and pedagogical innovations and ongoing evolution of work. Second, a quality framework presupposes agreement on several methodological and procedural principles, which will guide its implementation.

5.3.1. National quality frameworks

The Danish quality framework is based on the CQAF and concentrates on methodological principles, which stress (among others) involvement of stakeholders, monitoring outputs according to a set of quality indicators, the Ministry of Education's rights and responsibilities for approval, monitoring and inspection of training provision, EVA's responsibilities for accreditation as well as transparency and openness with regard to the results achieved.

The German quality framework is fixed in guidelines and recommendations set up by an advisory committee of representatives of the Federal and state (*Länder*) level, social partners, VET providers and independent experts. The requirements to be fulfilled include customer orientation, methods for fostering individual learning processes, regular evaluation of training programmes including monitoring of job placement, quality management structures and improvement schemes. Strong emphasis is put on issues related to labour market integration of trainees.

The quality framework of the French LdM approach in IVET is focused on definition of quality objectives or areas in which applying institutions have to meet certain standards by developing their own particular approach or 'project'. VET institutions are encouraged among others to shape their professional profiles and strengthen partnerships with the regional economy, territorial communities and higher education institutes.

The GretaPlus quality framework for CVET in France consists of nine areas of requirements, and applying institutions must demonstrate their capacity to fulfil them. The heart of the quality framework consists of several criteria related directly to implementation of tailor-made training programmes including: strategies to identify the training needs of beneficiaries, pedagogical objectives and organisation of training, accompaniment of the trainee and adequate assessment procedures.

The Hungarian quality framework builds strongly on self-evaluation and internal quality management of VET providers. It is therefore up to provider organisations to shape their quality objectives annually. Providers have to define their quality policy, their objectives and strategy as well as measurable key performance indicators to monitor the progress made. They have to implement the PDCA cycle (plan, do, check, act) in other words, plan, monitor, evaluate and improve their activities continuously. An annual training improvement plan based on results of the annual self-evaluation is required by law. Redesign of the Hungarian VET quality framework according to EQARF (European quality assurance reference framework) is currently in process. The integrated approach will also include review of the Hungarian accreditation system and criteria against the EQARF.

The quality framework applied in Italy, is interpreted and implemented differently by the regions. In principle, it is based on four overall policy principles, to support the lifelong learning approach, to keep control and achieve effectiveness, to simplify and verify the requirements for accreditation and to create synergies. Subsequently, the guiding principles are translated in five main partly related criteria, to ex-ante accreditation, and partly to

defining requirements for evaluation of training provided. The accreditation part specifies the preconditions to be met by VET providers to deliver quality, whereas the evaluation part concentrates on issues related to the effectiveness and efficiency of training.

The Romanian national quality assurance framework (NQAF) is based on the common quality assurance framework for VET in Europe, and includes seven quality principles that are focused on the performance and quality management system of the VET provider organisation. Other issues address management of resources, design, development and revision of training programmes, their student-centred organisation, assessment of learning and improvement of quality according to the results of monitoring and evaluation.

The quality framework in UK/England is under change and consists of a mix of curriculum development, and delivery and assessment of training according to criteria set by various agencies. The national framework of qualifications is manifestly the most important reference providing for adequate content, quality control, inspection and assessment within training. Nevertheless, taken together, almost in a multilayered way, the system covers all aspects of the quality framework. It could even be argued that the UK/England system is too complex, as too many agencies and bodies provide accreditation. Recent changes have been initiated to support greater simplicity and clarity of purpose of the system.

Table 9. National quality frameworks analysed

Main focus of national quality framework	DK	DE	FR IVET	FR CVET	HU	IT	RO	UK/EN
Methodological procedures	x	x		x		x	x	x
Identification of training needs	x	x		x		x		
Curriculum development			x	x				x
Stakeholder involvement		x			x			
Training process		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Assessment	x	x		x	x			x
Monitoring and evaluation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Continuous inspection	x		x			x		x
Relevance of CQAF/EQARF	x				x	x	x	

A comparison of national quality frameworks reveals both several common elements and differences. Regulations for the training process and for continuous monitoring and evaluation are two common features. Most frameworks stipulate differentiated specifications for VET providers. It is striking to notice that certain methodological principles important for the quality of training, like the strong involvement of stakeholders in the accreditation process or identification of training needs, are not a universal standard applying throughout all frameworks. It is also interesting to see from a European perspective that only in half of the analysed national systems reference is made to the CQAF/EQARF.

5.3.2. Sectoral quality frameworks

The quality framework established by EBTN for training in the banking and financial services sector is characterised by strong focus on delivery of certificates according to assessment of commonly agreed learning outcomes and application of a standard examination model. Additionally, the framework asks for a system of quality assurance that includes regular evaluation, review and updating of assessment procedures.

The ECDL accreditation system does not cover the training part but is focused on testing only. Even if test centres prepare their candidates, these training activities are not subject to quality assurance and accreditation. Focus of the ECDL accreditation system is purely to guarantee the correctness and transparency of the testing phase, which is to assess the candidates' abilities independently from their training.

In the hotels and restaurants sector, the quality framework for VET providers licensed by AH&LEI is focused on the training and certification part considering standards with regard to human resources and infrastructure. Licensed affiliates are expected to use common curricula and the mandatory teaching and learning materials.

The quality framework for accreditation of VET providers in the welding sector contains standards with regard to the provider's human resources and infrastructure and requests a quality management system. All providers have to operate with common framework curricula and use the mandatory learning and teaching materials, to assure quality of training and include monitoring and evaluation of the training process and its results.

Table 10 indicates clearly that sectoral quality frameworks are comparably lean. Only the framework applied in the welding sector puts strong demands on providers similar to national frameworks. Assessment procedures of students are the main issue in all sectoral frameworks. ECDL and the

approach applied in the banking and financial services sector focus on the assessment procedures only. Involvement of stakeholders is not a requirement in any of the frameworks. Identification of training needs is a standard in the banking and welding sectors. Apart from the banking sector, CQAF/EQARF is not reflected in sectoral frameworks.

Table 10. **Sectoral quality frameworks analysed**

Main focus of sectoral quality framework	Banking	ECDL	Hotels and restaurants	Welding
Methodological procedures				
Identification of training needs	x			x
Curriculum development			x	x
Stakeholder involvement				
Training process			x	x
Assessment	x	x	x	x
Monitoring and evaluation				x
Reference to CQAF	x			

While national frameworks put strong emphasis on standards for the training process, sectoral frameworks are less interested in them. Continuous monitoring and evaluation, prevalent throughout national frameworks, is required by the welding sector only. In general, the framework for the welding sector is closer to the standards set by national frameworks. This is probably due to the high safety requirements in this sector, which enjoys a relatively strong regulation all through Europe and worldwide.

5.4. Criteria for accreditation

In this section the criteria according to which VET providers are evaluated when applying for accreditation will be examined. Criteria have already been analysed in the presentation of national (see Chapter 3) and sectoral (see Chapter 4) accreditation systems. In Table 11, national sets of criteria are presented according to the priority they give to context, input, process, output, outcome and impact of VET, to point out where they focus in the logical sequence of training provision.

In general the national set of criteria cover all areas, but their main focus is on the first stages of the whole sequence: on context, input and process criteria. These areas are covered in most national approaches and they are at the same time more detailed than those in other areas of training provision. This applies mainly to input criteria, where appropriateness of VET providers' facilities and the equipment is checked as well as the soundness of their financial management.

An internal quality management system is a requirement in all countries as a context criterion, except for the LdM label in France. On the contrary, approval of demand and cooperation with partners in the territory are less required.

In most countries the qualification of training staff and availability of a detailed curriculum are checked as process criteria. From a European point of view, it is worth noting that internationalisation of training is considered in one country only (Denmark).

In addition, output and outcome criteria are less frequently and systematically covered compared to importance given to context, input and process criteria. Data clearly contradict widespread assumption of a general trend towards measurement of output and outcome in European VET systems. Although employment plays a significant role in setting the criteria that apply in national accreditation, it is surprising that their measurement is not yet a European-wide standard, despite all efforts to reduce the gap between education and employment systems.

Table 11. Accreditation criteria applied in countries

Focus of the applied accreditation criteria	DK	DE	FR IVET	FR CVET	HU	IT	RO	UK/EN
Context								
- approved demand	x	x						x
- links with territory	x		x			x		x
- quality management system	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x
Input								
- facilities	x	x			x	x	x	x
- equipment	x	x			x	x	x	x
- financial management						x	x	x
Process								
- curriculum		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
- training staff	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Output								
- drop-out	x							
- examination/graduation	x	x		x				x
Outcome								
- employment effects	x	x	x			x		
- cost-effectiveness		x				x		
Internationalisation	x							

It is less surprising, however, that cost-effectiveness and efficiency of training provision are not explicit criteria for accreditation neither in countries nor in the sectors examined. Calculating the cost-effectiveness of training provision is quite a difficult and cost-intensive exercise. In some countries this criterion is not considered at all (Denmark), other countries check quality of financial management of the provider organisation (Italy), but not cost-effectiveness of individual programmes. Control on the cost-side of training is made by authorities which provide public funding. In Denmark, training providers receive a lump sum per student and a small amount for overhead costs, and the Ministry of Education gives final approval, whereas in Germany the employment agency decides on the amount of public funds to be paid to VET providers. However, these examples indicate less application of a cost-effectiveness approach and more elements of a traditional input-steering control.

The accreditation criteria that apply in the sectors focus mainly on input and process and resemble thus national sets of criteria. A quality management system is an accreditation criterion in the welding and the banking sectors only. On the contrary, all sectoral systems include input criteria. The situation is similar concerning the training process, where ECDL is the only one with no criterion to apply to it. Measurement of output in terms of graduation rates is a prerequisite in three of the four sectoral accreditation schemes. Ongoing monitoring of the whole training cycle is a requirement in the welding sector.

Table 12. Accreditation criteria applied in sectors

Focus of the applied accreditation criteria	Banking	ECDL	Hotels and restaurants	Welding
Context				
- demand				x
- quality management system	x			x
Input				
- facilities		x	x	x
- equipment		x	x	x
- financial management	x ⁽¹⁾		x	
Process				
- curriculum, teaching material	x		x	x
- training staff			x	x
Output				
- drop-out				
- examination/graduation	x	x		x
Outcome				
- employment effects				
- cost-effectiveness				
Ongoing monitoring				x

⁽¹⁾ Input criteria are checked in connection with the application for membership in EBTN.

It is important to underline, that the outcomes of training, like employment effects, are rarely considered by sectoral approaches. This might be because sectoral accreditation systems apply to CVET and are therefore close to labour markets and their demands. However, in the welding sector proof of demand is mandatory at the beginning of the accreditation process.

When comparing national and sectoral criteria for accreditation it becomes immediately obvious that there are differences in scope. National accreditation systems tend to make use of a broad-ranged list of objectives, standards and criteria to be met before a provider organisation is evaluated positively.

Sectoral approaches (except for the system applied in the welding sector) are comparatively focused and lean. At least two of the four examined approaches concentrate mainly on assessment procedures and certification of individuals. Their focus is rather on testing than on training, criteria for accreditation of an ECDL centre intend primarily to guarantee correctness of the testing phase. However, the centre in question must have appropriate facilities in place to run the testing and keep appropriate records as well. In the banking sector accreditation refers to certification and certifying bodies. After successful accreditation, the training provider gets the right to issue certificates by applying the EBTN standard examination model together with the criteria and regulations defined in the accreditation contract. The most important criterion is delivery of skills and competences according to a predefined examination procedure.

The set of criteria that apply in the welding sector is more complex and focuses also on the training process and examination procedures. It also defines some preconditions for providing high quality training, like qualifications and experience of staff. Due to high quality, safety and environmental standards in the welding sector, it is also important to apply an input-oriented approach.

5.5. Accreditation process

In Denmark and UK/England accreditation is compulsory, whereas in the other countries it is voluntary. It must be noted, however, that this requirement is not fully implemented in Denmark yet, and it currently applies to new training programmes only. It is planned to have all existing training programmes accredited starting in 2012. For England it must be pointed out that accreditation applies only to those providers who intend to award officially-recognised qualifications. There are other providers who deliver qualifications not included in the NQF (national qualifications framework).

Table 13. Accreditation processes in countries

	DK	DE	FR IVET	FR CVET	HU	IT	RO	UK/EN
Precondition for delivery of diplomas	x	x				x	x	x
Precondition for public funding	x	x	n.a.	n.a.	x	x	x	
Accreditation body								
- ministry/regional authority			x	x		x		
- governmental body	x				x		x	
- external accreditation agencies		(27)						x
Site visit	x				x		x	x
Final recognition by:								
- ministry/regional authority	x		x	x				
- governmental body					x			
- external accreditation agency		x						x
Public announcement	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Duration of process (months)	3	3	12	15	2	x	4-12	2-15
Renewal after (years)	5-6	3	5	3	4	1	4	3-5
Interim monitoring (years)		1	1	1	-*	1	1	1-3
Quality label/certificate		(x)	x	x	(x)	-*		(x)

(*) Not specified, random inspections.

In most countries, successful accreditation is a precondition for having access to public funding and this requirement turns out to work as a strong lever for providers to get accredited. In France this criterion does not apply, as in both IVET and CVET possession of the quality label is voluntary and an additional element only.

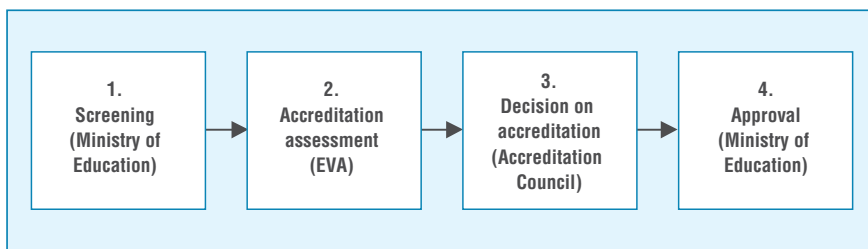
Different bodies are in place for accreditation. In Italy, it is the regional authority itself, which is responsible for the process; in France special committees were put in place, for CVET under the authority of the National Ministry of Education, for IVET under the auspices of the respective representative of the government in the region, the rector of the academy. In Denmark, an existing government body is charged with this task, and in Hungary and Romania these bodies were established from scratch. In England, different external agencies are engaged according to the awarded qualifications. In Germany, accreditation of CVET providers is market driven where at present 27 external agencies are active, after being recognised as accreditation agencies by a government body. Thus, providers can choose the accreditation body, best suited to their preconditions. They may also obtain accreditation from an agency itself recognised by authorities of another European Member State. Similar possibilities exist in Denmark and Hungary.

In some countries a distinction has to be made between responsibility for the accreditation process and the final decision on its results. In Denmark, France and Italy, the ministry/regional authority makes the final recognition, although based on a recommendation from an accreditation body; in Hungary and Romania, an independent professional body, the members of which are appointed by the ministry, decides. In Germany, an external agency has the decision-making power.

Figure 14 shows the main steps of the accreditation process and shared responsibilities between the Ministry of Education and EVA (the Danish Evaluation Institute, the agency responsible for the accreditation process): a first screening of the application is made by the ministry, the evaluation procedure is carried out by EVA, and the decision is made by a specific board, the Accreditation Council, which is recognised by the ministry, while formal approval is made again by the ministry.

It is a standard everywhere to make successfully accredited institutions known. In most cases this is done via the web, which means that information is accessible for everyone.

Figure 14. **The decision process in Denmark**



Source: Danish Evaluation Institute, 2009a.

The average duration of the accreditation process varies from one month (Italy) to 15 months (France, UK). In Denmark (three months) and Hungary (two months) the duration is defined by law. For France, the period for preparation for accreditation lasts about one year and is officially recommended and therefore included in the overall duration of the process.

Successful accreditation is valid for a period between one and five years, with the shortest cycle of one year being applied in Italy. A renewal after three years is obligatory in Germany and for the GretaPlus label in France; in Hungary and Romania accreditation must be renewed after four years, and the LdM label for IVET in France has to be renewed after five years.

However, an interim auditing takes place within most accreditation systems. In Denmark, the Ministry of Education undertakes a yearly inspection of achievement of quality objectives, in Hungary a similar measure is in place especially for weak providers. Here, inspection is undertaken according to results of a risk analysis in combination with a random approach. In the Lombardy region in Italy, monitoring of providers takes place randomly also. In Germany, the accreditation agency will check every year the effectiveness of the quality management system of the accredited VET provider. In France, accredited institutions have to submit to government representatives an annual audit report, whereas in Romania an external inspection of providers takes place once a year.

In most countries, successful accreditation is a precondition for access to public funding and this requirement is a strong lever for providers to become accredited. In France this criterion is not applicable, as in both IVET and CVET achievement of the quality label is a voluntary decision made by the provider. The accreditation process, which is necessary to obtain the label refers to public training organisations only (State owned).

Different bodies are in place for accreditation. In Italy, the regional ministry itself is responsible for the process; in France, special committees are in place, for CVET under the authority of the national Ministry of Education, for IVET under the auspices of the respective representative of the government in the region, the rector of the academy. In Denmark, an existing government body is charged with this task, and in Hungary and Romania special bodies have been established for this purpose. In England, different external agencies are engaged depending on the awarded qualifications. In Germany, accreditation of CVET providers is open to the market with today 27 external agencies competing, once recognised by a government body.

As result of successful accreditation, providers receive a specific certificate stating that the organisation and/or its programme(s) have been accredited. Such a certificate is awarded to providers in Germany, Hungary and UK. This certificate acknowledges the status of providers; however, a particular quality label that could be used as a brand name rarely exists. Such a distinction for good quality in VET is attributed to accredited institutions in France only.

In sectors, accreditation is a precondition for delivering diplomas recognised by the sectors and in the welding sector for having access in certain countries to public funding as well. Accreditation is undertaken by the same sectoral organisation that awards professional diplomas. Government bodies are not involved. Accreditation in the sectors analysed here is fully self-

organised by independent professional organisations with a leading role in the corresponding sector.

To evaluate applications, all sectoral organisations have established special committees consisting of technical and educational experts in the respective area of training.

Compared to national accreditation, the procedure for accreditation in two of the analysed sectors is short. Duration of the process is between 15 days (ECDL) and six to 12 months (hotels and restaurants sector, and welding sector). The longer period for the two last cases is due to more complex requirements and criteria in the accreditation systems. In the banking sector the procedure may last from one to three months.

Site visits are not foreseen in the procedure for becoming an ECDL centre, and in the banking sector site visits are conducted in exceptional cases only and not as an obligatory step. According to the ECDL framework site visits are of another character as they are used mainly to support the centres and strengthen relations with them as customers of the label. In the sectors which apply a broader range of accreditation criteria and which foresee site visits as an obligatory step, the accreditation process takes more time. VET providers interested in becoming a licensed affiliate in the hotels and restaurants sector get their licence after six months at the latest. In the welding sector the time span between the first expression of interest and accreditation of the candidate varies between six and 12 months.

In the welding sector, the shortest period for renewal of the accreditation is two years. This is probably because fast technological changes occur in this sector. The renewal is combined with an interim monitoring, which is called 'regular surveillance'. On the contrary, in the hotels and restaurants sector successful accreditation is valid for five years and this is the longest period of validity in all cases analysed. Renewal in the banking sector and for ECDL should take place every three years.

In the sectors presented in this report, it is not a standardised procedure to make public successful accreditations. However, a quality label or at least a certificate is awarded in all cases.

5.6. Accreditation and quality management

Above analysis of the criteria for accreditation has already shown that a functioning quality management system in a VET provider organisation is usually one of the prerequisites for being accredited. However, the scope

Table 14. Accreditation processes in the sectors analysed

Accreditation process	Banking	ECDL	Hotels and restaurants	Welding
Preconditions for delivering of recognised diplomas	x	x	x	x
Precondition for public funding				x ⁽¹⁾
Accreditation by				
- governmental body		x ⁽²⁾		
- sector organisation	x	x	x	x
Site visit	optional		x	x
Public announcement			x	x
Duration of process (months)	1-3	15-30 days	6	6-12
Renewal after (years)	3	3	5	2
Interim monitoring (years)				2
Quality label (certificate)	(x)	(x)	x	x

(¹) At national level.

(²) In some countries; however, in Ireland and Italy (countries analysed) government bodies are not involved.

of internal quality management and the tasks to be fulfilled are defined differently in the examined accreditation systems.

In Denmark, self-evaluation is a legal requirement for VET providers. The quality management system is evaluated during the accreditation process: a quality plan must be in place as well as procedures for self-evaluation, a follow-up plan and a plan for public dissemination of results.

In Germany, a systematic approach for quality assurance and quality development is a central criterion for accreditation. The quality framework does not ask for establishment of a formally-designed quality management system, however it is stated, that providers should apply standardised and recognised methods, for example according to ISO or EFQM. Certification of the quality management system in application is not required.

The LdM framework for IVET in France does not address explicitly internal quality management, but the procedures for accreditation suggest establishment of an internal 'academic group' to support applicants to meet the criteria for accreditation, to accompany implementation of quality objectives and to assess achievements together with the competent pedagogical bodies. Thus, this group may create an internal dynamic towards quality and excellence in the institution similar to a functioning quality evaluation system.

To obtain the GretaPlus quality label, public CVET organisations in France have to fulfil several requirements in relation to their internal quality management. VET institutions have to define their quality policy, precise

corresponding personal responsibilities, develop a strategy for the organisation with priority areas, establish an action plan, ensure evaluation of the quality objectives, foresee a complaints procedure as well as an approach for collecting client-related data and use them to improve quality of services. The final additional requirement refers to documentation of internal regulations and a system for dissemination of information.

In Hungary, training institutions applying for accreditation have to demonstrate that their quality policy is in line with the objectives of training, their operation principles and organisational culture. The quality objectives should be defined for a given year, be measurable, contain success criteria and be suitable for evaluation. The quality management system must define the processes for delivery of training, methods for continuous improvement of both processes and organisation, collection of data and feedback (on content, material conditions, methods of training, teachers' work, methods of organisation of training), procedures of communication with partners and the person responsible for operation of the quality management system. The institution also has to describe handling of complaints. However, a certification of the quality management system in application is not required.

In Italy, applicants for accreditation have to provide information on their quality management system in place and in the Lombardy region certification according to ISO 9001:2000 is a requirement.

In Romania, an internal quality management system is not considered a precondition for VET accreditation, but each provider should have a commission for quality assurance and evaluation. This commission prepares the quality manual that includes the quality policy, procedures for quality assurance, documentation, decisions to allocate roles and responsibilities, etc. The commission also draws up a self-evaluation report and formulates proposals for improving quality of vocational education and training.

In UK/England rigorous self-evaluation and effective action planning to address identified areas for improvement should be an integral part of providers' management systems. In their annual self-evaluation report, which is a precondition for accreditation, providers should evaluate themselves against the evaluation requirements. The development plan should show how providers will address areas for improvement and build on strengths. For internal purposes providers may choose whatever process and model best meet their needs. The UK/England system looks like covering everything and it really does, but it should be noted that it is a multilayered, multiinstitutional and multiagency approach. This means that accreditation requirements have to be covered in all respects which may use up all efforts and energy

to apply formal and informal processes of accreditation at the expense of updating curricula and meeting real market needs.

When comparing requirements for quality management systems, it is interesting to see that many of their elements are taken on board by national approaches to accreditation. This starts with the requirement for providers to articulate a quality policy encompassing establishment of a mission and a vision, and definition of objectives and aims. This includes the requirement for a development strategy and entails the demand for comprehensive

Table 15. National requirements for quality management systems

	DK	DE	FR IVET	FR CVET	HU	IT	RO	UK/EN
Quality policy (!)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Personal responsibilities	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Development strategy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Definition of core processes	x				x	x		x
Improvement plan	x				x	x	x	x
Data collection methods		x				x		x
Evaluation procedures	x	x		x	x	x		x
Documentation	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Dissemination of results	x			x		x	x	
Complaint procedure				x	x	x		x

(!) Includes mission, vision, objectives and aims.

documentation. However, it is striking that requirements for data collection methods are rarely specified, although collection of information is a precondition for evaluating achievements of quality objectives and improvement of quality should be built on reliable information.

Dissemination of results is another issue, considered in national requirements for VET providers' quality management systems. Thus, in half the national accreditation frameworks it is up to providers how they deal with results of quality assurance activities. In these cases providers decide by themselves whether they will provide information to students and other stakeholders or whether they will include them in the evaluation of the current situation and development of strategies for change.

The requirement to have a complaints procedure is obviously another weak point. Although this is a basic requirement for each organisation committed to quality, it is not addressed by all national frameworks.

This finding corresponds to the outcomes of our research on the sectors, where only the scheme applied in the welding sector asks for establishment of a complaints procedure. In general, apart from the welding sector, requirements for quality management systems in the sectors are even fewer than in national systems. In the sectors the strongest focus is on documentation, which allows verification that certain quality standards have been respected. Since the requirements applied are rarely oriented towards improvement of quality, dissemination of results participation of stakeholders and organisational development strategies are not issues treated within accreditation systems in application, see Table 16.

As already mentioned within EBTN’s accreditation system, a quality management system is a precondition for accreditation, and drafting a self-evaluation report is part of the accreditation procedure. The quality management system should document the roles and responsibilities of those involved in evaluation of programmes. The procedures should also outline how evaluation methods and materials are checked to ensure they are appropriate. The institution should provide evidence that it reviews regularly and strives to improve its quality assurance through an internal audit process.

Table 16. Sectoral requirements for quality management systems

	Banking	ECDL	Hotels and restaurants	Welding
Quality policy	x			x
Personal responsibilities	x			x
Development strategy				
Definition of core processes			Not applicable	x
Improvement plan			Not applicable	x
Data collection methods		x	Not applicable	
Evaluation procedures	x		Not applicable	x
Documentation	x	x	Not applicable	x
Dissemination of results				
Complaint procedure				x

NB: The requirements empty in the table apply to the sectors, but they are not carried out.

According to the ECDL quality framework test centres are not required to run an internal quality management system. However, within the ECDL Foundation, a quality management system has been established, certified in 2005 with the ISO 9001:2000 standard. The ECDL Foundation aims through its licensee audit programme to transfer its quality standards to

institutions operating as licencees but not to the testing centres at least not for the moment.

In the hotels and restaurants sector and in the context of the AH&LEI scheme most criteria are not applicable for accreditation, because the scheme does not require a quality management system operating at training provider level. Instead, quality of training is ensured through AH&LEI which delivers the content and syllabus of training programmes. Nevertheless there are some issues that fall under the responsibility of providers, like definition of personal responsibilities, establishment of a development strategy or a procedure for dealing with complaints, that the AH&LEI scheme does not address.

Implementation of a quality management system is a prerequisite for starting the accreditation process in the welding sector. National umbrella organisations offer applying VET providers a manual for implementing a quality management system including a procedure for handling customer complaints. Thus, the welding sector offers the most comprehensive set of requirements for the quality management system of VET providers.

5.7. Results and impacts of accreditation

In Denmark, the new accreditation system is considered positively by most stakeholders, as far as this could be evaluated because it is still a 'young' system. The accreditation system was tested in a pilot phase, also involving the umbrella organisation of educational institutions. Applicants (training providers) were surveyed by EVA based on a questionnaire after the first cycle of experimentation to collect their feedback. Most of them were satisfied with the process.

The accreditation procedure in Denmark puts strong demands on applying providers as of 30 applications for accreditation of new VET programmes presented in 2008, 20 were approved and 10 were not. When there was not such an accreditation system in place with all quality criteria of the new system, most applications were reapproved even under the new system. It should be noted that VET providers wishing to deliver for the first time a training programme previously delivered by another provider, have to ask for accreditation.

In Germany, the accreditation framework has three objectives: strengthening competition, increasing transparency and achieving better quality in delivery of VET. In relation to the first objective, accreditation led to important selection of training providers as there are currently about 3 500 accredited providers for

publicly-funded CVET, whereas before the reform there were approximately 10 000 providers. Public authorities can now allocate budgets more easily and safely due to better control of costs and quality.

Concerning better transparency for customers and comparability of training programmes, results of implementation of the accreditation framework are less positive. It is still difficult to compare different training programmes systematically, but at least customers can draw some conclusions on the quality of training delivery and customer orientation of CVET providers.

Applying for accreditation helps providers improve their internal quality because they have to take on board obligations expressed during evaluation of their application. Most applicants have to follow instructions on improvement since only 8% of providers get certified without any comments. For those providers with no quality management system in place before they applied for accreditation, their structures and procedures have improved probably because of the requirement to implement a quality management system to get accredited. However, doubts have been expressed that even when implemented, these quality management systems are not always operating properly.

Umbrella associations of training providers in Germany call for a reduction in bureaucracy. However, they appreciate the fact that specific accreditation criteria are closely related to training and employment.

In Hungary, accreditation has a clear impact on activities of institutions and on their way of thinking. If one compares the way adult training providers operated in 1995 and at present (2009), one concludes that:

- they are more mature, they work more systematically and are better organised;
- they are more up to date on the content of training (they apply the new NQR);
- their training offer, training content and structure are much more in line/adapted to labour market needs;
- they deliver increased value and better quality for money;
- they demonstrate both thorough planning and more flexibility.

Approximately 1 200 accredited institutions are able to meet high quality requirements leading to better training provision. They all have defined their quality policy, annual quality objectives/targets, have a quality management system in operation, evaluate the process of training provision continuously, conduct self-evaluation every year, and – based on results of a self-evaluation exercise – elaborate and implement a (training) improvement plan.

In France, around 20% of *lycées* have been accredited as LdM so far, but the Ministry of Education intends to increase the percentage to 50% by

the end of 2010. In CVET, 45 of 220 Gretas have achieved the quality label GretaPlus. In successfully labelled institutions the accreditation process has contributed to improve the full range of services and developmental work and communications seem better structured and more goal-oriented. Accreditation seems to be of restricted value, in the world of business; its main results and impact can be observed inside institutions. The accreditation procedure helps to orient providers towards customer needs and overcome the culture of schooling (*culture scolaire*). One of the visited institutions has decided to apply a concept of learning organisation (*organisation apprenante*) to boost internal dynamics towards better quality.

The main quantitative result of the accreditation system in Romania has been establishment of a national registry of 2 883 authorised providers, of which 468 are public, 2 362 private and 53 public-private. Thus, seen globally, a national system for CVET has been created that operates under market terms.

In Romania, the number of authorised programmes is increasing by 18% yearly in parallel with social partners' interest in constitution and participation in the (so far) 23 sectoral committees under coordination of CNFPA (National Council for Adult Vocational Training). Both can be considered an indication of increased quality.

The UK/England accreditation system has been effective in the past, bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages of its multiagency approach. Impacts of accreditation on training delivery have spanned a wider VET audience covering over 2 000 schools, 450 colleges and promoted growing collaboration across university and VET/FE sectors. Despite the above, there has been some criticism about lack of cohesion as institutions and programmes often face inspections from a multitude of accrediting bodies. Recent institutional changes should ensure greater cohesion in the future, as the independent inspection process applied by OfSted will be adopted by the new institution for accreditation and quality assurance.

The sectoral case studies have identified positive results and impacts, too. Providers see the ECDL label primarily as a commercial promotion giving more credibility to the certificate and contributing to their stability. In the banking sector the accreditation system is contributing to achieving common European-wide quality standards. Up to now (2010), all applicants for accreditation have been successful but, not all at their first attempt. Within the past four to five years around 7.500 certificates were issued to employees by accredited training institutions and demand is increasing.

In the hotels and restaurants sector, training providers that hold a licensee affiliation of AH&LEI have a strong competitive edge at regional or national levels. VET students receive training according to the current state of the art and modern trends in the sector. Obtaining an internationally well-known certificate increases their job mobility and labour market perspectives.

In the welding sector the number of diplomas issued by the European Welding Foundation can stand as a proxy indicator for the value and reputation of the accreditation system in place. The cumulated number of EWF diplomas has amounted from less than 16 000 in 1995 to more than 100 000 in 2007, an indication of significant market penetration. Training is delivered according to the current state of technology, science and safety standards. Due to ongoing monitoring, VET providers are involved in a permanent process of supervision of their training and examination facilities, procedures and results. VET providers recognised by the national accreditation body strengthen their position in the education and training market in the welding sector. Providers can use the name, logo and high reputation of the national umbrella organisation for their promotion, an advantage when tendering for significant contracts.

Taken together the results of the accreditation systems in place are quite convincing: the systems are widely accepted by providers, they capture the market and they deliver VET according to predefined quality standards without direct involvement of public authorities.

Concerning the impact of accreditation in VET to the outside business world and to society as a whole, it is surprising that marketing quality in VET is widely neglected in particular at national level. ECDL is a brilliant example of branding and the same is the American quality mark in the hotels and restaurants sector as well as the quality logo used in the welding sector; all three demonstrate the added value of accreditation. In national systems and apart from the French GretaPlus label, recognised quality labels for successful providers rarely exist. Thus, possibilities for providers to refer to their recognised quality when communicating with clients and potential trainees are rather restricted. Different to sectoral approaches, there is no marketing strategy in place to improve external impact of accreditation systems by stressing the recognised quality of accredited VET providers. An enormous external potential to increase attractiveness of VET for young people in a lifelong learning perspective still waits to be exploited.

Sectoral frameworks foster a certain Europe-wide comparability, as they are almost homogeneous all over the EU. Both national and sectoral accreditation systems are based on strong, widely consolidated legal/national

and professional/sectoral frameworks, continuously fine-tuned and adapted. Adequate procedural elements are often in place: detailed information is made available to VET providers intending to apply for accreditation, appropriate application tools are widely accessible via Internet and accreditation bodies disseminate results of the accreditation process online to the public.

5.8. Challenges

As already pointed out, the main purpose of the accreditation systems analysed is to assure that minimum standards in delivery of VET are respected. Weak performers disappear from the market, whereas successfully accredited providers increase their credibility.

However, concentrating on respect of minimum standards of quality, VET providers tend to neglect improvement of quality of training they offer. It is difficult to combine both and it is a particular weakness that most analysed accreditation systems are biased to lack of improvement.

There are several options to overcome the identified weaknesses of accreditation systems currently in place.

Table 17 summarises, based on a SWOT analysis, the main characteristics of analysed accreditation systems.

The main challenge for the future is to develop accreditation into a driving force for improvement of quality in VET and overcome the bias between conformity to minimum standards and quality improvement. More support to VET providers in shaping their quality objectives and implementing quality criteria could help. Accreditation systems should put stronger focus on effectiveness of quality management systems of VET providers and specify the conditions for their effective operation. Strengthening outcome orientation is another way to improve quality of training services and provision of appropriate tools would help VET providers to collect valid and reliable data that could even allow comparability between them.

Acting alongside these opportunities would also help to avoid several risks. It is a common risk to enlarge the number of criteria and standards for accreditation instead of focusing on decisive factors which really impact on quality, such as a quality management system of providers and reliable evaluation of goal achievements. The sectoral frameworks by applying only a few criteria and standards, provide good examples of lean accreditation systems with limited bureaucratic burdens on VET providers.

In a worst case scenario, accreditation systems will further neglect the improvement dimension and continue to expand towards external monitoring and detailed control of VET providers with the implicit effect that costs and efforts would increase for providers and accreditation would turn into a business industry.

Table 17. Current strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the future

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Strong legal/professional frameworks for national/sectoral systems</p> <p>Continuous revision and adaptation of procedures and criteria for accreditation</p> <p>Transparency of the accreditation process: all tools for accreditation are available online</p> <p>Results of accreditation are made publicly available for potential clients</p> <p>Assuring minimum standards in VET service provision, clearing the market</p> <p>European-wide comparability (sectoral systems only)</p>	<p>Prevailing input-orientation in national accreditation systems</p> <p>Weak specifications for data collection methods to evaluate achievement of quality objectives</p> <p>Neglected measurement of output and outcomes of training delivered</p> <p>Impacts of accreditation on VET systems not fully exploited</p> <p>Weak orientation towards improvement of training quality</p> <p>Internationalisation is rarely an issue in national systems</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Strengthening the evolving links between the VET sector and the employment system</p> <p>Developing accreditation into a driving force for improvement of quality</p> <p>Supporting VET providers in implementation of quality criteria</p> <p>Stronger focus on quality management systems of VET providers; specification of demands for an effective quality management system</p> <p>Strengthening outcome orientation: availability of adequate tools to verify quality of training delivery</p> <p>Achieving European-wide comparability of accreditation systems and procedures (for national systems)</p>	<p>Multiplication of criteria and standards for accreditation instead of focusing on quality</p> <p>Increasing bureaucratic burdens for VET providers</p> <p>Expansion of external monitoring and control of VET providers</p> <p>Emergence of an accreditation industry</p>

Common trends and strategies for the future

This chapter focuses on the identification of common trends in accreditation and way to overcome the identified weaknesses. Potential strategies are discussed on how to encourage further developments.

6.1. Process of accreditation

Analysis of all cases has confirmed that there is no real lack of appropriate information and guidelines for VET providers willing to undergo an accreditation procedure. Usually there are several services (ministries, accreditation bodies, umbrella organisations of VET providers) that distribute information via their websites, where relevant documents can be downloaded free of charge.

The main steps of the accreditation procedure are broadly the same and typically consist of the steps summarised in the prototype of the accreditation process.

Prototype of the accreditation process

Main steps in the accreditation process

1. The request for accreditation submitted by the provider organisation is analysed. The analysis consists of checking if the client has met the relevant criteria and standards, (existence of a clear plan, etc.); an estimation of the duration of the accreditation process is then made.
2. A detailed analysis of the documentation submitted (the client's management systems, quality manuals, self-evaluation report and improvement plan) is made.
3. A time period for solving the nonconformities identified by the accreditation body is specified to the applying provider.
4. As an optional step: an evaluation during a site visit (to check whether the quality management system as described in the documentation is actually implemented by the provider).
5. A follow-up evaluation takes place.
6. Final analysis of the information collected and decision (including writing the final evaluation report which culminates in the decision on whether to accredit or not, or under which circumstances, the applying provider, taken by the responsible body for accreditation).

6.2. Criteria for accreditation

In the analysed sectoral approaches the number of criteria for accreditation is quite limited, whereas national accreditation systems apply a broad list of criteria against which providers are evaluated. These criteria might encompass financial management and accounting issues, data on infrastructure, premises and equipment, on competences of teachers, technical and administrative personnel as in the case of Edexcel.

National accreditation systems put emphasis on regulations of the training process, whereas sectoral frameworks do not. They concentrate mainly on examination testing procedures and on certification of individuals. Sectoral frameworks evaluate outputs of training in terms of competences and this brings them closer to the needs of sectors and the labour market in general.

However, they do not take on board either learners' perspectives and needs or the learning process, an important weakness because learners are left completely on their own to achieve the training objectives and get certified.

Sectoral systems, especially those in the banking sector and ECDL, are possibly too focused and lean. They could take on board some criteria from national systems, attributing more weight to the training process. On the other hand, national systems could learn from sectoral systems how to reduce the exhausting number of criteria they usually apply.

In some national systems, prevailing criteria for accreditation still come from the traditional input-oriented approach, although their general ambition might be different. A review of existing criteria could shape orientation towards assessment of output and outcomes of training, and encourage providers to pay more attention to graduation and employability of their students.

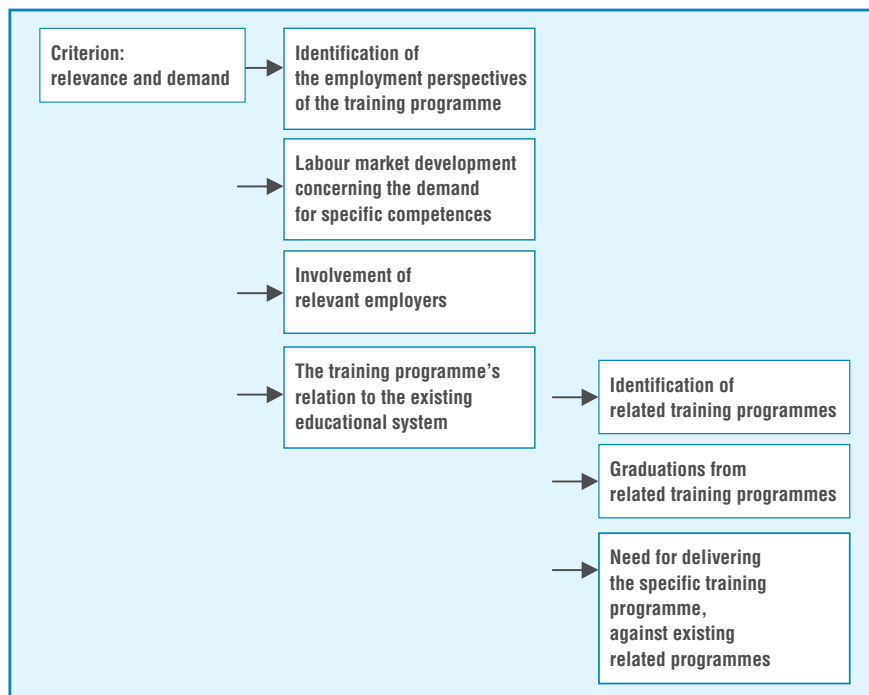
6.3. Accreditation and employability

As outlined in Chapter 5, evolving links between the VET sector and the employment system could help to put more emphasis on output and outcome criteria. Seen against this background a more systematic measurement of results and impacts of training is one approach to improve quality of VET and employability of VET students. However, appropriate tools for VET providers to collect the necessary data are often missing, restricting sufficient information on relevance of the training offer and the possibility for comparisons and benchmarking between providers.

However, not only measurement of output and outcomes could strengthen the links between VET and employment. Other criteria could be considered too. In the Danish accreditation system, for example, each training programme presented for accreditation has to demonstrate its relevance to the labour market and its potential outcomes in terms of employability of graduates. Further, as shown in Figure 15, the principle of involvement of local stakeholders in deciding on the content of training programmes is an important factor. In the accreditation process, applying providers will be asked if and how they have analysed trends in the (regional) labour market, prospective demand for the competences to be acquired through the training programme and the employment perspectives of future students. Employers should also be invited to participate in the analysis initiated by the VET providers.

Figure 15 is an example of implementing accreditation criteria with particular attention to outcomes and involvement of stakeholders is a key issue.

Figure 15. Operationalisation of accreditation criteria in Denmark



Source: Danish Evaluation Institute, 2009a

In the Lombardy region in Italy, existing links of VET providers to their territory are used as criteria for accreditation since they serve to evaluate relevance of the training for the regional and local labour markets. Hungary provides another approach to how to increase employment prospects of students through regional cooperation and stakeholders' involvement. In 2007, seven regional development and training committees (*Regionális Fejlesztési és Képzési Bizottságok*, RFKBs) were established by law and are run by the Educational Office. They consist of representatives of regional branches of national employers' and employees' organisations, chambers of commerce and trade, regional labour councils, ministries responsible for education and VET, VET institutions – VET providers and VET establishment owners and representatives of the Educational Office.

They play an increasingly important role in establishing a demand-driven VET system and coordinating VET regional development activities. RFKBs contribute to aligning development of school-based VET with labour market needs. They elaborate regional strategies for VET; they tender for development funds and draw up regional lists of qualifications and trades in short supply. Since 2008, RFKBs also decide on the goals of regional VET, regional demands for VET, corresponding vocational training offers needed and on the appropriate number of student enrolments.

RFKBs activities in developing regional VET strategies and distributing development subsidies cover all types of VET. They also make efforts to coordinate school-based VET (IVET), VET outside the school system (CVET) and VET in higher education.

VET providers need orientation on which indicators to apply in their own internal quality management systems to assure quality of their services. As seen in Chapter 5, such indicators and respective methods for evaluation and data collection are not sufficiently defined throughout all national and sectoral frameworks. Accreditation frameworks should not dictate to VET providers a full list of indicators to be applied. However, research conclusions point to a need for greater relevance of training offered to regional, local or sectoral labour markets; establishment of a small and coherent set of indicators could serve as a common core element strongly to orient the quality efforts of VET providers towards a quality culture based on output and outcomes.

The Danish national framework makes use of such a set of indicators for measuring quality focused on output and outcome data (Figure 16).

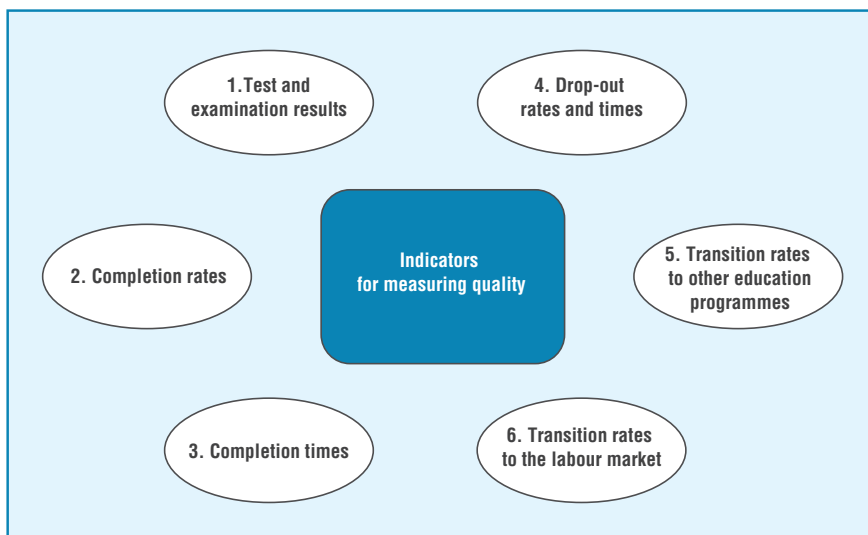
The set of indicators, used in the Danish system, was developed in the context of European cooperation in VET within the Copenhagen process.

In 2009, this cooperation resulted in adoption of a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009a). A comprehensive set of quality indicators to support evaluation and quality improvement is presented in Annex II of the recommendation and the Danish framework builds on this and on some of the proposed indicators.

Without doubt there are other indicators to be used to improve quality in VET. National or sectoral frameworks as well as VET providers should be encouraged to enrich this common set of indicators with their own indicators reflecting their particular needs for improvement.

Use of a common set of quality indicators present several advantages. Focusing on output and outcomes these indicators are related to two important objectives of VET, namely to strengthen the links between VET and the employment sector and to improve employability of VET students. Reflecting the training-cycle these indicators are related to one another and produce more useful information than isolated indicators. Application of a coherent chain of indicators, reflecting the main objectives, process and results of training, will certainly help render quality dynamics in VET more comprehensive (Cedefop, Seyfried, 2007).

Figure 16. **Quality indicators in the Danish VET system**



Source: Danish Ministry of Education, 2008b.

A set of quality indicators should become part of the prototype summarising the procedural steps for accreditation in Section 6.1 as a possible element of a common European strategy on accreditation in VET.

6.4. Accreditation in VET and higher education

The case studies presented in this study have identified some interesting developments towards a closer relationship between VET and higher education, towards creation of a common framework for accreditation in the perspective of lifelong learning.

In UK/England, the recognised body for accreditation is not a one-off organisation, but rather a ‘continuous process’ with different elements involving different agencies in its implementation. It is the State or region or private or public or ‘historical’ or ‘new’ organisations that make accreditation work in all its aspects. They are all part of a national framework which is a community/political/ministry-led policy that applies to all education and not just to VET – the framework being similar for universities even though some are quite different from VET.

Similar developments are reported from Denmark, where EVA (Denmark’s Evaluation Institute) is the only body responsible for evaluation of educational programmes under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, whereas ACE (Denmark’s Accreditation Agency), is the institution of the Ministry of Science, responsible for all accreditations in HE. There is, however, a common decision-taking body for both institutions, the Accreditation Council (*Akkrediteringsraadet*) founded in 2006 by the Ministry of Science. The Accreditation Council evaluates the quality of EVA’s accreditation reports (by comparing them with reports of ACE), but the Ministry of Education reserves the right for final approval of accreditation of VET programmes.

In Hungary, there are two different bodies for accreditation in VET and HE, the Adult Training Accreditation Body (ATAB), which is the decision body for VET and the ‘Hungarian Accreditation Committee’ responsible for higher education. In the course of its operation, ATAB considers resolutions and propositions of the Hungarian Higher Education Accreditation Committee (MFAB) and it also invites MFAB representatives to participate at its meetings with a consultation right. ATAB will accept accreditations issued by the Accreditation Committee for Higher Education, there is no additional accreditation procedure for HE institutions that intend to provide VET programmes.

Thus, at least in the three countries cited above, a similar landscape exists: a common framework for accreditation in VET and HE, with different bodies carrying out the technical process of accreditation. The observed variations in safeguarding responsibilities of the State authorities, reveal, once more, that VET is more under government control than HE.

But the three examples also demonstrate that commonalities between VET and HE are growing and that development of a common approach to accreditation seems to become a realistic option, and is expected to be boosted by growing importance of the lifelong learning approach in education and VET.

6.5. Common recognition of accreditation in the EU

According to the regulations foreseen in Germany and Denmark, VET providers and VET programmes can be accredited by a foreign accreditation body if this body is recognised in another European country according to the same standards that apply in these two countries. This is possible due to implementation of the EU Single Market Directive (123/2006 EC) regarding the free movement of services and freedom of performing activities. The directive affects adult training activities as these are not considered as public services free of charge but services provided in a competitive market. The directive does not affect directly the accreditation system of adult training providers. However, the example of Hungary demonstrates that adoption of this directive will create opportunities for common recognition between similar systems of other Member States. The law foresees that a Hungarian VET provider can accredit its adult training activities by a foreign agency located in another Member State. In its application for accreditation the provider should prove compliance with those accreditation criteria not part of the Hungarian accreditation system. Similarly, the minister responsible for adult training should define in a separate provision of law (ministerial decree) the particular elements of accreditation systems in other EU Member States that can be recognised in Hungary.

Opportunities for cooperation and recognition in sectors of similar nature are increasing. Under this perspective, sectoral frameworks need to be harmonised with national accreditation systems which are becoming progressively more elaborated. In the welding sector, the following statement: 'The experience of EWF in harmonisation of certification of personnel and companies indicates that it is of high importance to link the harmonised European certification with

national certification systems' (Quintino and Ferraz, 2007, p. 7), shows that harmonisation is more than a possibility, it is actually a necessity.

Another EU legal act, Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008a) setting out the requirements for accreditation and market surveillance relating to the marketing of products which is mandatory for Member States from 2010, may contribute to common recognition of procedures and criteria applied to accreditation since it asks Member States to create a single national accreditation body (NAB) ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

The regulation also provides information on how to deal with sectoral accreditation and stipulates that: 'Sectoral accreditation schemes should cover the fields of activity where general requirements for the competence of conformity evaluation bodies are not sufficient to ensure the necessary level of protection where specific detailed technology or health and safety-related requirements are imposed. Given the fact that the European Union has at its disposal a broad range of technical expertise, it should be requested to develop such schemes, especially for areas covered by Community legislation' (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008a, p. 32).

From the above, it seems logical to assume that creation of a single national accreditation body will certainly impact on existing accreditation systems in some Member States and sectors and change the way they are structured.

However, in sectors at the edge of technology and largely accepted by the VET market system, expected changes will have a smaller effect, like welding, where authorised national bodies (ANB) accredited by EWF/IWF will continue to license VET providers according to high quality, safety and environmental standards, losing nothing of their importance.

6.6. Accreditation and quality in VET

This section focuses on ways to develop accreditation into a driving force for improving quality in VET. As underlined in Chapter 5 current systems of accreditation often privilege assurance of minimum standards in VET at the expense of improving quality of training provided since they include no or very few incentives in this direction.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Impact of the European regulation on accreditation on selected European countries was discussed in a workshop in Athens in 2008. For example, the impact on Germany was described by Golze (2008), the impact on Greece by Bakeas (2008).

As already mentioned, four crucial factors have been identified which could promote stronger orientation of accreditation systems towards quality, namely: links of the VET sector to the employment system, involvement of stakeholders, increased regional cooperation and, last but not least, measurement of output and outcomes by a relevant set of indicators.

6.6.1. Better quality for VET providers

Implementation of an internal quality management system by VET providers can be considered one of the most crucial issues to improve quality at their level. This instrument allows them to strive continuously for better quality, apart and independently from accreditation, which is, after all, an external evaluation that takes place just once in three to five years. Therefore, operating an effective internal quality management system should be defined as a requirement *sine qua non* in all accreditation systems if supporting better quality in VET is the ultimate objective.

In several frameworks, however, certain elements constituting a fully operative quality management system are not sufficiently addressed and defined. Specifying the prerequisites for effective operation of a quality management system is a common challenge.

Sectoral frameworks foresee an effective quality management system even less often than national systems. ECDL does not ask for a quality management system in providers' organisations. The AH&LEI scheme in the hotels and restaurants sector has a built-in quality assurance element, but this is limited to licensed training programmes and cannot affect a provider organisation itself. The scheme does not require a quality management system at organisational level.

Conversely, there are country examples where strong focus in the accreditation process is put on quality of the internal quality management system of the provider organisation and on the learning process of students. This is, for example, the case for the criteria applied in the GretaPlus standard in France.

The national framework applied in Hungary also puts strong emphasis on establishment of a self-evaluation system. Institutions should define the fields of evaluation (in line with legal provisions) and also the methods to be applied for self-evaluation. According to the national framework the self-evaluation system should provide an opportunity for evaluation of the institution-wide operation on a yearly basis. The self-evaluation process should cover characteristic features, namely the enablers in the organisation, with special regard to the role of management in development of a quality culture within the organisation, management of human resources, definition

and implementation of the strategy of the institution, management of partner relationships and regulation of processes. Self-evaluation should also include thorough analysis of the training activity of the institution, and results achieved (society results, participant perception on the organisation of training, evaluation of training material and tutors' performances, employees' and tutors' perception of the institution and its performance in delivering training, key performance results and measures of the training activity of the institution).

In Germany, the AZWV system for accreditation requires establishment of an internal quality management system. The system-related criteria addressing the internal quality management system are linked to input as well as to output and outcomes, such as trainees' satisfaction with training received, successful graduation and integration into employment. According to the German accreditation framework, the full list of criteria applies only when a provider asks for accreditation for the first time, whereas reaccreditation focuses exclusively on the internal quality management system and its effective functioning.

A European systematic strategy on accreditation in VET – to be developed as an integral part of European cooperation on quality assurance (EQAVET) – would need a comprehensive set of requirements to boost an effective internal quality management in VET provider organisations. Country examples of Germany, France and Hungary could serve as a starting point to switch focus of accreditation towards improving training quality at provider level.

6.6.2. Better quality for VET systems

In principle, broad-scaled accreditation of VET providers should impact on quality of the VET system, too, but there are indications that links between accreditation and quality improvement of VET systems are not yet fully exploited (see Chapter 5). While a quality label for successfully accredited VET providers is quite widespread in sectoral frameworks, it is hardly found in the analysed country examples –except in France. A common marketing strategy to raise attractiveness of the VET sector is not in place. In most national systems successful accreditation is a precondition for getting access to public funds, but a rewarding system to support delivery of good training quality does not exist.

An exception is Denmark, where a voluntary scheme that encourages providers to achieve better quality is in place. Each year the government defines political priorities crucial for further development of the VET sector and providers can apply for funding in relation to these priorities, which have included quality assurance for many years.

Further, since 2000, Danish providers are required to carry out comparable evaluations of all the CVET programmes they provide. For this purpose, a national self-evaluation tool was developed (see: www.viskvalitet.dk), that now constitutes a compulsory element of providers' quality strategies. The aim is to measure both participants' satisfaction and learning outcomes, and enterprises' satisfaction with the CVET their employees have received. This tool generates aggregated data on quality in CVET at national level and thus overcomes existing deficits and further shapes the quality of VET at system level.

Unfortunately, this is not general practice. Despite a lot of information produced in all accreditation systems, there is often no provision at system level to allow best use of it and the results achieved. Even the benchmarking approach in the Lombardy region does not really draw conclusions from results achieved.

In Germany and Hungary, annual reports of accreditation bodies at least provide results on accrediting VET providers, and are used, among others, to adapt the policy framework for VET.

Finally, it should be stressed that for improving the whole VET system not only VET providers should be asked to apply the quality cycle, but VET systems as well. Quality objectives for VET systems should be continuously evaluated and redefined and as for providers this should take place a yearly through stocktaking results achieved, and identifying strengths and weaknesses.

6.6.3. Orienting accreditation towards quality improvement

As already pointed out current accreditation systems are characterised by an ambiguity between the obligation to account for what is in place already and the aspiration to contribute to quality in VET. Given this, there seem to be two options on how to proceed with accreditation in VET in the future. In the first option, accreditation could follow an administrative route and fulfil primarily its controlling and accountability function, without a strong relation to improvement of quality. In this option, the main task of accreditation would be to check existence of minimal standards for providing vocational training with the main intention to delete bad quality. Following this option accreditation would concentrate mainly on control of input standards, infrastructural preconditions, sound financial management, appropriateness of machinery and equipment used by providers. This type of accreditation could be carried out by accounting and business professionals and technical experts, but not necessarily by training experts.

The second option would be to bring accreditation and quality closer together, to overcome existing bias in accreditation systems towards control

and accountability and to focus accreditation more strongly on issues with a direct impact on quality of the training process. In this scenario accreditation would concentrate on assessment of learning output and outcomes and on boosting internal dynamics towards more quality within VET provider organisations.

Deleting bad quality is different from boosting good quality. The difference in focus is decisive because both alternatives use standards, criteria and tools. An accreditation procedure focused on improvement of quality will have to attach less priority to its controlling function and address with highest priority the internal quality management system of the provider. This approach would support VET providers in establishing an internal quality management system to contribute effectively to quality of training provision and to the learning process of students.

The present study suggests a multistep approach to accreditation of VET providers to overcome the above-mentioned ambiguity. This approach should improve quality in VET without neglecting the accountability function of accreditation. As a first step basic accreditation should be compulsory and VET providers should demonstrate their conformity and commitment towards existing regulations, standards and criteria to prove their accountability.

For training organisations successfully accredited, additional steps of excellence should be put in place on a voluntary basis. Beyond essential standards for basic accreditation, excellence steps should provide training organisations with further incentives to achieve higher levels of quality. These steps should form an explicitly quality driven approach and aim continually to improve quality of training provision. In case of successful implementation, providers should obtain a quality level of excellence. Providers applying for accreditation according to this framework should demonstrate sustainable improvements of their output and outcomes. As a further step in implementation of such a framework, the performance of these providers could be benchmarked nationally. Outstanding providers could be rewarded financially and/or by gaining greater visibility at national and/or European levels. Depending on progress of European cooperation in establishing a common framework for accreditation in VET, transnational benchmarking of outstanding providers could be envisaged.

It should be noted that a similar framework already exists in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007).

Conclusions and recommendations

In this report four sectoral and eight accreditation systems in VET were analysed in detail. The findings revealed certain differences and similarities as well as many common elements. In general, commonalities in objectives predominate over differences in approaches and there seems to be sufficient ground to move forward towards a common systematic strategy for accreditation in VET.

7.1. VET provider organisations

As demonstrated, effective operation of an internal quality management system is the key issue for VET providers to strive for better quality. However, although this should be a fundamental prerequisite for being accredited, it is certainly not enough.

National and sectoral accreditation systems should encourage providers to shape their own quality objectives apart from the standardised set of quality criteria applied in the accreditation process. VET providers should be eager to take leadership of their quality approach and continuously shape, check and redefine their organisational profile and their related quality objectives. More systematically, they should make use of monitoring and regular review of evaluation results to identify weaknesses, install permanent quality management and organise change towards better quality.

To boost quality, VET providers should implement and support a culture of learning in their organisations. Several routes are available: they can apply a concept of learning organisations, they can ask for advice from outside, from professional experts or peers from other providers, or apply for external certification of their quality system.

Umbrella organisations of VET providers could support exchange of experiences with internal quality management systems, assisting providers to identify crucial issues, to learn from one another and render their quality management systems more effective. However, such an exchange of experiences might be limited due to competition between providers. Nevertheless,

it should be possible to organise common learning processes, for example through peer reviews.

VET providers and their umbrella organisations should be given a voice on the boards of accreditation bodies. They could present their experiences in applying for accreditation and their views on the criteria and standards applied in the accreditation process. Finally, they should make proposals on how to simplify the accreditation process and reduce bureaucratic burdens. In Germany for instance, the umbrella organisation of VET providers presented its own proposal for an accreditation framework adapted to and focused on the particular conditions in VET (Bundesverband der Träger beruflicher Bildung, 2005). The BQM standard is not an alternative to the official national framework but responds to requirements of the German law, business industry and VET trainees. At the same time it is a specified framework, which can be applied both by small and big VET providers. Thus, the BQM standard is intended primarily as a tool for providers to concentrate their efforts on quality of the training process and its continuous improvement. The BQM standard itself is also continuously revised, considering changing the outcomes of legislative preconditions for accreditation, new requirements of industry and the labour market as well as experiences of VET providers.

7.2. Member States and accreditation bodies

Within their national quality frameworks Member States could strengthen involvement of stakeholders of VET and employment sectors and ease participation of VET students. These stakeholders could contribute to development of accreditation criteria, follow accreditation procedures and contribute with their experience and advice on boards of accreditation bodies.

Member States and accreditation bodies should give public access to results of evaluation of VET providers.

Based on comparison of achievements an additional instrument could be introduced such as an incentive or rewarding system for VET providers delivering outstanding performances. Excellent VET providers could be given prominence by a public mark of distinction.

Member States could promote cooperation with an umbrella organisation of VET providers as well as with professional organisations which could provide external support services to VET providers to establish their internal quality management systems and increase effectiveness of their operations. Such support should be clearly separated, however, from evaluation activities undertaken during the accreditation process.

Marketing is another field Member States could play a significant, if not decisive, role to render quality in VET more visible and VET itself more attractive.

Creation of quality labels for successfully accredited VET providers could help to increase attractiveness of the sector in this direction. Member States could also strengthen cooperation between VET and higher education accreditation bodies, identify common elements and make progress in establishing a coherent framework for accreditation covering all sectors of their educational system without neglecting the specificities of each sector.

At European and international levels, Member States could exchange experience on implementation of national accreditation systems. They could learn from one another how to build coherent and effective national accreditation frameworks for VET and how to strengthen the elements which support the quality improvement function of accreditation. To build common trust, evaluators from foreign Member States could be invited to participate in the accreditation process of VET providers and in board meetings of accreditation bodies as is the case in higher education, for instance.

As a result of increased cooperation in VET, the common recognition of accreditations should no longer be restricted to some countries (see Section 6.5) but become a European-wide standard to include all Member States. VET providers should be encouraged to seek accreditation from agencies outside their own countries, given the important commonalities in national accreditation frameworks identified in this report.

At first glance, this cooperation may be easier to establish in Member States which have an accreditation body with a national mission, than in those where an open market for accreditation exists with agencies competing under direction of a public accreditation council.

7.3. Sectoral umbrella organisations for accreditation

Sectoral umbrella organisations with an accreditation system for VET providers could seek a cross-sectoral exchange of experiences to discuss differences and commonalities in their approaches, to compare and learn from one another.

Some sectoral systems should shift their focus from assessment and examination procedures and pay more attention to the training process and needs of learners. In addition, they could strengthen the quality dimension of their accreditation systems, by encouraging providers to operate an

internal quality management system, something to become a prerequisite for accreditation in sectors.

7.4. European cooperation

Given the future challenges for accreditation and its crucial relationship to quality in VET, accreditation should be given increased priority in European cooperation.

Improved European cooperation between accreditation institutions working within vocational education and training should be developed as an integral part of existing European cooperation on quality assurance (EQAVET). The main procedural steps common to all accreditations outlined in this publication (see Section 6.1.) combined with the set of quality indicators laid down in Annex II of the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009a) provide a strong basis for developing and implementing a common systematic strategy on accreditation in VET. Such cooperation should, as EQAVET itself, be taken forward on a voluntary basis in full respect of Member States' competences and promote cooperation, to exchange good practice and seeking to build consensus.

When addressing accreditation in VET within European cooperation, the approach followed in higher education (HE) could be helpful. In HE, common European standards and guidelines for quality assurance have been published and endorsed by Ministers for Education of the Bologna signatory States at their Bergen meeting in May 2005. These standards and guidelines are designed to apply to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function, size and the national system they are located in.

The recommendation on the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2008 and ongoing developments of national qualifications frameworks in all Member States requires gradual strengthening of common understanding and trust among education, VET and sector stakeholders. Increased cooperation on accreditation is an important step in building this trust.

Glossary

accreditation of an education or training provider

A process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to an education or training provider, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards. (Cedefop, 2008c (adapted from Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 2003)).

assessment of education and training *see* evaluation of education and training

assessment of learning outcomes

Process of appraising knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria (learning expectations, measurement of learning outcomes). Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.

Comment: in the literature, 'assessment' generally refers to appraisal of individuals whereas 'evaluation' is more frequently used to describe appraisal of education and training methods or providers. (Cedefop, 2008c).

awarding body

Body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure. (Cedefop, 2008c).

certification (quality)

Process by which a third party gives written assurance that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements. (ISO).

certification body (quality)

Body that gives written assurance that a product, process or service conforms to specified requirements following an assessment against predefined criteria. (Adapted from ISO).

certification of learning outcomes

Process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard.

Comment: certification may validate the outcome of learning acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings. (Cedefop, 2008c).

competence

Proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. (European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2008b).

or

Ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development).

Comment: competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (involving technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (such as social or organisational skills) and ethical values. (Cedefop, 2008c; European Commission, 2006a).

continuing education and training

Education or training after initial education and training – or after entry into working life – aimed at helping individuals to:

- improve or update their knowledge and/or skills;
- acquire new skills for a career move or retraining;
- continue their personal or professional development.

Comment: continuing education and training is part of lifelong learning and may encompass any kind of education (general, specialised or vocational, formal or non-formal, etc.). It is crucial for employability of individuals. (Cedefop, 2008c).

criterion

Principle or reference item used to assess, analyse or compare. (Cedefop, 2011).

education or training provider

Any organisation or individual providing education or training services.

Comments:

- education and training providers may be organisations specifically set up for this purpose, or they may be others, such as employers, who provide training as part of their business activities. Training providers also include independent individuals who offer services;
- certification of providers is a key element of quality in education and training. (Cedefop, 2011).

European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET)

Technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users guides. (European Commission, 2009b).

or

Device in which qualifications are expressed in units of learning outcomes to which credit points are attached, and which is combined with a procedure for validating learning outcomes. The aim of this system is to promote:

- mobility of people undertaking training;
- accumulation, transfer and validation and recognition of learning outcomes (either formal, non-formal or informal) acquired in different countries;
- implementation of lifelong learning;
- transparency of qualifications;
- common trust and cooperation between vocational training and education providers in Europe.

Comment: ECVET is based on a description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences), organised into transferable and accumulable learning units to which credit points are attached and registered in a personal transcript of learning outcomes. (Cedefop, 2008c; European Commission, 2006a).

European qualification framework for lifelong learning (EQF)

Reference tool for description and comparison of qualification levels in qualifications systems developed at national, international or sectoral levels.

Comment: the EQF's main components are a set of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes (combination of knowledge, skills and/or competences) and mechanisms and principles for voluntary cooperation. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those recognising basic knowledge, skills and competences to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional and vocational education and training. EQF is a translation device for qualification systems. (Cedefop, 2008c (based on European Commission, 2006a)).

or

Reference tool to compare qualification levels of different qualifications systems and to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society, as well as further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems. (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008b).

European quality assurance reference framework (EQARF)

European quality assurance reference framework which comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision) based on a selection of quality criteria, descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels. The aim is not to introduce new standards, but to support Member States' efforts, while preserving the diversity of their approaches. (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009a).

or

Reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references, which builds on and further develops the CQAF.

Comments:

- recommendation on establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training was adopted on 18 June 2009;
- methodology proposed by the framework is based on:
- a cycle consisting of four phases (planning, implementation, assessment and review) described for VET providers/systems;
- quality criteria and indicative descriptors for each phase of the cycle;
- common indicators for evaluating targets, methods, procedures and training results – some indicators are to be based on statistical data, others are of a qualitative nature. (Cedefop, 2011; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009a).

evaluation of education and training

Judgment on the value of an intervention, programme or policy with reference to criteria and explicit standards (such as its relevance and efficiency).

Comments: evaluation encompasses two broad aspects:

- evaluation as a systematic investigation to determine the worth or merit of a programme, measure or policy by means of careful appraisal and study, based on relevant social research methods and criteria, standards and indicators (summative evaluation or impact evaluation);
- evaluation as a developmental process that illuminates or enlightens specific policies, processes and practice for its stakeholders, contributes to collective learning, reduces uncertainty in decision-making and helps to improve design and implementation of the programme and/or of future related initiatives (formative or process evaluation). (European Commission, 1999; Cedefop, 2011).

initial education and training

General or vocational education and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life.

Comments:

- some training undertaken after entry into working life may be considered as initial training (such as retraining);
- initial education and training can be carried out at any level in general or vocational education (full-time school-based or alternance training) pathways or apprenticeship. (Cedefop, 2008c).

learning outcome(s)/learning attainments

Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal. (Cedefop, 2008c);

or

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008b).

lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. (European Commission, 2001; Cedefop, 2008c).

outcome (quality)

Positive or negative longer-term socioeconomic change or impact that occurs directly or indirectly as a result of an intervention's input, activities and output. (Adapted from Johnson Center).

outcome indicator in VET

Statistics on the outcomes of VET, measuring, for example, job performance, rate of access to next level of education or rate of inclusion on the labour market. (Cedefop, 2011).

output (quality)

Immediate and direct tangible result of an intervention. (Cedefop, 2011).

programme of education and training

Inventory of activities, content and/or methods implemented to achieve education or training objectives (acquiring knowledge, skills and/or competences), organised in a logical sequence over a specified period of time.

Comment: the term programme or education of training refers to implementation of learning activities whereas curriculum refers to the design, organisation and planning of these activities. (Cedefop, 2008c).

qualification

The term qualification covers different aspects:

- (a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes on the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practise a trade;
- (b) job requirements: knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform specific tasks attached to a particular work position.

(Cedefop, 2008c, based on European Training Foundation, 1997; Eurydice, 2006; ILO, 1998; OECD, 2007).

qualification framework

Instrument for development and classification of qualifications (for example, at national or sectoral levels) according to a set of criteria (such as using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.

Comment:

A qualification framework can be used to:

- establish national standards of knowledge, skills and competences;
- promote quality of education;
- provide a system of coordination and/or integration of qualifications and enable comparison of qualifications by relating qualifications to one another;
- promote access to learning, transfer of learning outcomes and progression in learning.

(Cedefop, 2008c (based on European Commission, 2006b; OECD, 2007).

quality

Totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs. (ISO 8402).

or

Degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements. (ISO 9000).

quality assurance in education and training

Activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement to ensure that education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, management, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by involved stakeholders.

Comments:

- QA contributes to better matching between education and training supply and demand;
- QA covers macro-level (educational system level), meso-level (level of individual educational institutions) and micro-level (level of teaching-learning processes). (Cedefop, 2011).

quality control

Operational techniques and activities used to fulfil requirements for quality. (ISO 8402).

or

Part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. (ISO 9000).

quality framework for accreditation of learning providers

Regulations, criteria, procedures (identification of training needs, resources, design of curricula, quality management system, evaluation of VET, assess-

ment of learning outcomes, output monitoring, etc.) set for accreditation of learning providers.

quality management system

Management system to direct and control an organisation with regard to quality. (ISO 9000).

quality manual

Document stating the quality policy and describing the quality system. (ISO 8402).

or

Document specifying an organisation's quality management system. (ISO 9000).

quality policy

Overall intentions and direction of an organisation with regard to quality as formally expressed by top management.

Comments: the technical working group on quality in VET identified three quality policy objectives at system level:

- improvement of employability of the labour force;
- better matching between training supply and demand;
- better access to VET, in particular for vulnerable groups.

(ISO 8402; Cedefop, 2011).

quality requirement

Needs or expectations expressed in terms of quality. (Adapted from ISO 9000).

quality system

Organisational structure, procedures, processes, and resources needed to implement quality management. The quality system provides the framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating services provided and for carrying out required quality assurance and quality control. (ISO 8402; Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection).

self-assessment of a VET provider: use self-evaluation of a VET provider.

self-evaluation of a VET provider

Any process or methodology carried out by a VET provider under its own responsibility, to evaluate its performance or position in relation to two dimensions:

- an internal dimension ('micro-level dimension') that covers services, internal staff, beneficiaries or clients, policy and/or internal organisation, development plan, etc.;
- an external dimension ('macro-level dimension') that covers analysis of the educational offer of this institution compared to others, relationship with the territorial system of actors (local deciders, unions, local governments, type of labour market and needs of VET, information network, type of populations interested in a learning offer and evolution of the needs, main results of work at national and European levels concerning the VET sector).

This double self-evaluation allows VET providers not only to improve their internal systems of quality control but also to evaluate their own position in their various environments. (Cedefop, 2011).

self-assessment (of a learner)

Ability of learners to observe, analyse and judge their performance based on predefined criteria and determine how they can improve it. (Alverno College, 2006).

skill

Ability to perform tasks and solve problems. (Cedefop, 2008c; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008b).

skill needs

Demand for particular types of skills, competences or qualifications on the labour market (total demand within a country or within a region, economic sector, etc.). (Cedefop, 2011).

specification (quality)

Explicit set of requirements to be satisfied by a material, product, or service. (Wikipedia).

standard

Statement, approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. (ISO).

teacher

Person whose function is to impart knowledge, know-how or skills to learners in an education or training institution.

Comments:

- a teacher may fulfil several tasks such as organising and carrying out training programmes/courses and transmitting knowledge, whether generic or specific, theoretical or practical;
- a teacher in a vocationally-oriented institution may be referred to as a 'trainer'.

(Cedefop, 2008c; AFPA, 1992).

trainer

Anyone who fulfils one or more activities linked to the (theoretical or practical) training function, either in an institution for education or training, or at the workplace.

Comments:

Two categories of trainer can be distinguished:

- professional trainers are training specialists whose job may coincide with that of the teacher in a vocational training establishment;
- part-time or occasional trainers are professionals in various fields who take on, in their normal duties, part-time training activity, either in-company (as mentors and tutors of recruits and apprentices or as training providers) or externally (by occasionally offering their services at a training establishment).

Trainers may carry out various tasks:

- design training activities;
- organise and implement these activities;
- provide actual training, transfer knowledge, know-how and skills;
- help apprentices develop their skills by providing advice, instructions and comments throughout the apprenticeship.

(Cedefop, 2008c; AFPA, 1992).

validation (quality)

Confirmation, through provision of objective evidence that the requirements for a specific intended use or application have been fulfilled. (ISO 8402 and 9000).

validation of learning outcomes

Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification. (Cedefop, 2008c).

List of abbreviations and acronyms

A&CC	Accreditation and certification committee
ACE	Danish Accreditation Institution (Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitutionen)
AFNOR	Association Française de Normalisation (French Association for Standardisation)
AFPA	National Adult Vocational Training Association (France)
AH&LA	American Hotel and Lodging Association
AH&LEI	American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute
ANB	Authorised national body
ANBCC	Authorised national body for company certification
Aracip	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Preuniversity Education
Asbl	<i>Association sans but lucratif</i> (non-profit organisation)
ATAB	Adult training accreditation body (Hungarian abbreviation is FAT)
ATB	Approved training bodies
AZWV	<i>Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung Weiterbildung</i>
BQM	<i>Bildungs-Qualitäts-Management</i>
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAP	<i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> (Certificate of professional aptitude)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CHE	Certified hospitality educator
CQAF	Common quality assurance framework
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
DE	Deutschland (Germany)
DIN	<i>Deutsche Industrienorm</i> (German industrial norm)
DIS	Distributed interactive simulation
DK	Denmark
DVS	Deutscher Verband für Schweißen und verwandte Verfahren (German Association of Welding)
EBTN	European bank training network
ECDL	European computer driving licence
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EFCB	European Foundation certificate in banking
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EQARF	European quality assurance reference framework
EQF	European qualification framework
EU	European Union
EVA	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (Danish Evaluation Institute)
EWf	European Welding Foundation, nowadays: European Federation for Joining, Welding and Cutting
FE	Further education

FR	France
HE	Higher education
Hotrec	Hotels, restaurants and cafés in Europe (Trade association for hotels, restaurants and cafés in the European Union)
HU	Hungary
IAB	International Authorisation Board
ICDL	International computer driving licence
ICT	Information and communication technology
IEC	International electrotechnical commission
IHA	Hotelverband Deutschland (German Hotel Association)
IIW	International Institute of Welding
ISCED	International standard classification of education
ISFOL	Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers)
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
IT	Italy
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
KVU	<i>Erhvervsakademiuddannelser</i>
LdM	<i>Lycée des métiers</i>
NATB	National Adult Training Board (Romania)
NIVE	National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education (Hungary)
NQF	National qualification framework

NQR	National qualifications register (Hungarian = OKJ)
NVQ	National vocational qualification (UK)
OCN	Open college network (UK)
OfQual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (UK)
OfSted	Office for Standards in Education (UK)
PDCA	Plan, do, check, act
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority (UK)
QMS	Quality management system
RO	Romania
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UK/EN	UK/England
VET	Vocational education and training

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Useful websites

Denmark Danish Evaluation Institute Danish Ministry of Education France French Ministry of Education List of accredited Gretas	http://www.eva.dk http://www.uvm.dk http://eduscol.education.fr http://eduscol.education.fr/D0035/gretus012.htm
Italy Lombardy Region: Direzione Generale Istruzione, Formazione e Lavoro	http://www.Formazione.regione.lombardia.it
Banking sector European bank training network (EBTN)	http://www.ebtn.eu
ECDL European computer driving licence	http://www.ecdl.org/publisher/index.jsp
Hotels and restaurants sector American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA) American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AH&LEI) Brussels Business Institute (BBI) of Higher Education, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management which is accredited by the World Tourism Organisation and its WTO-THEMIS Foundation and licensed by the American Hotel & Lodging Association	http://www.ahla.com/ http://www.ei-ahla.org/

<p>Educational Institute German Hotels Association Hotrec – Hotels, restaurants and cafés in Europe (Trade Association for Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés in Europe), which brings together 40 national hospitality associations in 25 countries across Europe World Tourism Organisation (WTO)</p>	<p>http://www.bbi-edu.eu/ http://www.hotellerie.de http://www.hotrec.org http://unwto.org/en</p>
<p>Welding sector American Welding Society (AWS) American sector umbrella organisation Deutscher Verband für Schweißen und verwandte Verfahren (DVS) e.V. (German Federation for Welding and Applied Technologies) German sector umbrella organisation DVS Media GmbH, which publishes books and newsletters on subjects related to joining and welding European Foundation for Welding, Joining and Cutting (EWF) European sector umbrella organisation International Institute for Welding (IIW) international sector umbrella organisation TWI Corporation Ltd International certification services in welding, inspection and NDT, acting as an ANB in the UK</p>	<p>http://www.aws.org http://www.dvs-ev.de http://www.dvs-media.eu http://ewf.be http://iiw-iis.org http://www.twicertification.com/</p>



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Assuring quality in vocational education and training The role of accrediting VET providers

Luxembourg:
Publications Office of the European Union

2011 – VI, 220 pp. – 17 x 24 cm
ISBN 978-92-896-0832-9
doi:10.2801/91293
Cat. No: TI-RF-11-002-EN-C

Free download at:
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3061_en.pdf

Free of charge
No of publication: 3061 EN

Assuring quality in vocational education and training

The role of accrediting VET providers

In this study the role of accreditation of VET providers and its relation to quality assurance are analysed by means of in-depth case studies into eight national and four sectoral accreditation systems.

In both systems strong and widely consolidated legal frameworks are continuously fine-tuned and adapted in their methodologies. Their results are quite convincing: the systems are widely accepted by providers, have captured the market and delivered VET according to predefined quality standards with or without direct involvement of public authorities. Accreditation has a clearing effect as weak performers disappear from the market and successfully accredited providers increase their credibility and visibility. Use of quality labels is less than expected but can be observed in the sectoral examples in particular, where its added value for VET providers and its impact on the business world can be clearly defined.

While the main function of the analysed accreditation systems is to assure respect of minimum standards in VET delivery, the main future challenge is to develop accreditation into a driving force for improvement of quality. To progress towards this objective, the study suggests a multistep approach to accreditation and concludes with recommendations for national, sectoral and main European stakeholders.

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3061 EN

Free of charge. On request from Cedefop



Publications Office

ISBN 978-92-896-0832-9



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