

VALUING ALL LEARNING

**A Quality Assurance
Policy for Vocational
Education and Training**

A Working Document
prepared by the
Malta Qualifications Council
April 2007

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The Malta Qualifications Council is composed of Charles Mizzi as Chairman, Felix Borg, Anthony DeGiovanni, Veronica Grech, Grace Grima, Charmaine Portelli and Emmanuel Zahra as Members.

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MESSAGE

FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT,
THE HON. DR LOUIS GALEA

It is my government's firm commitment to enhance vocational education and training in Malta. Over the last ten years, vocational education and training has had remarkable innovations and success stories. The opening of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, the increase in the quality and number of training courses at the Employment and Training Corporation and at the Institute of Tourism Studies, as well as the strengthening of adult education provision by state and private institutions are significant steps towards a knowledge-based society.

These working documents prepared by the Malta Qualifications Council, lay the foundations of Malta's National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (NQF) within the context of vocational education and training. They are also documents which propose Malta's NQF within the European Qualifications Framework which, on the 5th of September 2006, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the EQF. In the last week of September 2006, the EP adopted the report by Thomas Maan on the creation of an EQF. It is expected that the EP will adopt the EQF in Autumn 2007. They spell out the standards and criteria on which such a framework is based and the necessary steps that stakeholders need to take to ensure that vocational education and training qualifications in Malta become tools for mobility, progression, transferability and employment.

This is a very essential step in our reform programme in education and training. Malta's proposed NQF lays the groundwork for a bridging exercise between vocational education and compulsory education on the one hand and higher education on the other. Malta's NQF is a neutral device which locks together in synergy and complementarily, the four main educational strands: Compulsory, Vocational, Higher and Adult education. This is, in my opinion, the main function of our National Qualifications Framework. It illustrates, in a transparent manner, the various routes to learning. It aims at valuing all learning in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. It provides clear pathways to learning experiences which can lead to employability and personal enrichment. It opens up the opportunities for public and private training providers to build the professional capacity within their organizations in order to ensure quality education at all levels of their training provision. It gives Malta the opportunity to have an autonomous and self-regulating system of education and training at all levels and in all sectors.

The challenges that an NQF poses on us are to build our capacity to create qualifications that are demand-driven and directly related to Malta's economic and social needs; to ensure that such qualifications fit within an agreed qualifications framework for lifelong learning; to guarantee that Malta's qualifications are recognized nationally and internationally and serve to attract overseas learners of the highest quality, and finally, that informal, non-formal and prior learning as well as sectoral qualifications form the backbone of Malta's NQF in the years to come.

I wish to encourage all stakeholders to play an active and constructive role in this ongoing process. Malta's NQF and our vocational education and training system are instrumental in addressing our economic needs, in building capacity in vital sectors of our economy and in ensuring that all learning is valued against agreed standards and criteria.

Most of all we want an NQF and a VET system, including quality assurance, which respond to inclusion, competitiveness and excellence.

LOUIS GALEA

PREFACE

The aim of publishing three working documents is to instigate an informed dialogue on the proposed National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the implications of the Framework to vocational education and training, the sector which falls within the remit of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC).

MQC was set up in December 2005 to steer the development of a national qualifications framework and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which is not already provided for by compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies.

The working documents carry a single title *Valuing all Learning*. It indicates MQC's objective of providing the standards, criteria and infrastructure necessary to value all formal, informal and non-formal learning within the parameters established by Legal Notice 347 of 2005. The working documents reflect the discussions carried out within MQC and with key stakeholders and international consultants commissioned to critically review these documents.

The first document entitled *A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* focuses on the philosophy underlying the level descriptors for each of the eight levels designed to represent all qualifications in Malta. The Framework has two distinctive routes: the academic and the vocational route which converge into the higher education sector defined in terms of the Dublin descriptors. Each level is described in detail indicating its implications to learners and other key stakeholders in particular training providers, employers, those representing workers and social partners.

The second working document entitled *AVET System for Malta's National Qualifications Framework* looks at our current VET system within the proposed NQF and focuses on aspects related to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to mobility, progression, transferability and employability. The document illustrates how our VET system requires the intensive capacity building and the support of a comprehensive policy which adopts an outcome approach to accreditation, learning, assessment and certification. The document also focuses on the importance of having VET programmes driven by industry.

The third document spells out a *Quality Assurance Policy for VET within the NQF*. It illustrates MQC's policy on quality assurance support mechanisms for vocational education and training. Aware of the fact that VET institutions in Malta may possess quality assurance policies, this document draws on the proposed VET quality assurance policy published by the European Commission to suggest an overall QA policy for Malta's VET provision.

We hope that these three documents will stimulate discussion and form the basis of an agreed policy for a National Qualifications Framework that adds quality and visibility to vocational education and training and opens up new opportunities for learning within and outside our public and private training institutions.

Valuing all Learning is the goal that MQC aims to achieve through its policies and standards. We are confident that these documents will provide a valuable support to engage key stakeholders to participate in this ongoing dialogue.

CHARLES MIZZI
Chairman

JAMES CALLEJA
A/Chief Executive

Abbreviations

AQF	- Australian Qualifications Framework
BTEC	- Business & Technology Education Council
CS	- Certificate Supplement
DS	- Diploma Supplement
ECTS	- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	- European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training
EHEA	- European Higher Education Area
ENIC	- European National Information Centre
ENQA	- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	- European Qualifications Framework
ERA	- European Research Area
ERDF	- European Regional Development Fund
ESF	- European Social Fund
ESIB	- National Union of Students in Europe
ETF	- European Training Foundation
ETQA	- Education & Training Quality Assurance Bodies (South Africa)
EU	- European Union
EUA	- European University Association
FHEQ	- Framework for Higher Education Qualification Levels (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
GCE	- General Certificate of Education (U.K.)
GCSE	- General Certificate in Secondary Education (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
ICT	- Information and Communication Technology
ICMCH	- Institute of Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage - Heritage Malta
ISCED	- International Standard Classification of Education
KC	- Key Competences
MATSEC Board	- Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examination Board
MCVET	- Malta Credit Transfer System for VET
MQC	- Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	- Malta Qualifications Framework
NARIC	- National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NCEA	- National Certificate of Education Act (New Zealand)
NQF	- National Qualifications Framework
NRP	- National Reform Programme
NSB	- National Standards Board (South Africa)
NSSB	- National Skills Standards Board
NVQ	- National Vocational Qualifications (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
OPM	- Office of the Prime Minister
SAQA	- South African Qualifications Authority
SCQF	- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEC	- Secondary Education Certificate
SGB	- Standards Generating Bodies (South Africa)
SS	- Sectoral Skills
SVQ	- Scottish Vocational Qualifications
UK	- Underpinning Knowledge
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
VET	- Vocational Education and Training

Contents

Page

Executive Summary 11

PART ONE 13

1.0 Quality Assurance: A Conceptual Framework for

1.1 Lifelong Learning

The Need for Standards

1.2 Government's commitment to Quality Assurance in Education

1.2.1 Quality Assurance at Compulsory Level

1.2.2 Quality Assurance at Further and Higher Education

1.3 An International Commitment to Quality Assurance

1.3.1 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

1.3.2 Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and

the recognition of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

1.3.3 Quality Assurance and the European Qualifications Framework

1.4 Agreement on the need for Quality Assurance

PART TWO 23

2.0 Quality Assurance for Vocational Education

2.1 The model of Quality Assurance in Industry

2.1.1 The ISO System

2.1.2 The EFQM model of excellence

2.2 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

2.2.1 Guidelines for internal Quality Assurance in

Higher Education

2.2.2 External Quality Assurance

2.3 A European Quality Assurance framework for VET

2.3.1 The CQAF model proposed for VET in Europe

2.4 Key Elements of Quality Assurance for VET Qualifications

2.5 Conclusion

PART THREE 41

3.0 The proposed Framework for Quality Assurance of VET Qualifications in Malta

3.1 General Quality Assurance Principles endorsed by the MQC

3.2.1 Acceptable physical amenities to provide training

in adequate and safe conditions

3.2.2 An administrative structure that is efficient

in the administration of the services provided

3.2.3 Capacity of trainers

3.2.4 Assessment systems which allow learners to have

a fair and truthful judgement of his/her competences,

together with a system of appeals which allows an

individual the right of having a fair re-evaluation

should there be a dispute on assessment

3.2.5 A Quality Assurance system, internal and external,

which provides continuous monitoring and evaluation,

as well as mechanism for improving the training provision

within the institution.

3.3 Methodology which MQC will adopt in accrediting

3.4	Vocational Training Institutions	
3.5	Quality Assurance of Training Courses	
3.6	Role of MQC in Course Quality Assurance	
	Conclusion	
PART FOUR		59

4.0	Access to information	
4.1	A commitment to transparency	
4.2	Key players involved	
4.3	Information to be made public	
4.4	MQC's commitment to communication	
4.5	Conclusion	

List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
1	Representation of Management Fundamental Concepts in EFQM	27
2	Graphical Representation of the CQAF model	34
3	Mapping the Accreditation Process	41
4	Schedule 1 as stated in L.N. 44/2002	44
5	Schedule 2 of L.N. 44/2002	44
6	Article 10 (1)-(4) of Legal Notice 36/2003	46
7	Process of accrediting Training Institutions	51
8	Areas of course delivery where Quality Assurance is essential	53
9	Roadmap to accreditation of courses	57

List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
1	Quality Assurance Frameworks referred to in the EQF Commission Document	22
2	Planning: Quality criteria	34
3	Implementation: Quality Criteria	35
4	Evaluation and Assessment Quality Criteria	36
5	Review Quality Criteria	37
6	Requirements for accredited Certification	42

Executive Summary

This third document accompanying Malta's proposed national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (Vol.1) aims at giving the reader a general overview of the importance of quality assurance in the provision of services and in indicating the main policies upon which the Malta Qualifications Council intends to navigate in its process of regulating vocational education and training (Vol.2).

In this volume, quality assurance (QA) is defined as essential tool to guarantee standards in the provision of vocational education and training. QA in VET is therefore seen as a crucial measure in preparing a solid workforce for Malta's economic growth.

The document refers to government's commitment towards achieving, maintaining and sustaining a better quality of life for its citizens. Ensuring a "future of excellence for all" is a political target which can only be fulfilled if our educational structures respond to it effectively and efficiently. Ensuring quality education is one of the main points of departure of this policy document. Such direction is backed by evidence from education and in particular from the higher education sector within the European Higher Education Area. This is extended to the importance of quality assurance mechanisms in the accreditation of informal, non-formal and prior learning.

There is a necessary link with the European Qualifications Framework document in which quality assurance is defined as "a crucial dimension of the proposed EQF and commitment to a set of common principles is a precondition for cooperation between stakeholders at different levels". Such assertion has been amplified in the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) which the Commission, Member States and social partners have designed to enable institutions to raise the quality of their education and training by rendering procedures as transparent and as accessible to all stakeholders as possible. There is a detailed account of the quality assurance frameworks referred to in the EQF document. This is to ensure a more solid anchorage with systems which will eventually govern the European standards in quality assurance in vocational education and training.

Since vocational education and training is directly related to industry, the document illustrates how the model of quality assurance in industry guarantees that consumers are provided with quality products and services and that standards are regularly updated in order to ensure competitiveness and development. Reference is made to the mechanisms implemented through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). Both systems have been used in this working document to illustrate how the combination of quality assurance and quality management is a central issue in the provision of a service or a product.

In the context of vocational education and training, the working document draws on a parallel approach with higher education. The purpose of this strategy is to create a forum for a deeper analysis of the importance of integrating academic and vocational higher education and on the process needed to ensure that learners can progress within a national qualifications framework from the lower to the higher levels of achievement in education and training.

Internal and external quality assurance is also discussed in order to underline the importance of the principle of reciprocity in the context of quality assurance of qualifications. So far, the prevailing culture in Malta has been to attach qualifications to foreign frameworks and institutions. This document, as well as the two other volumes on the NQF, encourages a culture change.

Malta's capacity to design, award and certify competences in all the main sectors of development has come of age. This is the spirit by which the third and fourth parts of this volume are governed.

The proposed framework for quality assurance of VET qualifications in Malta maps the general principles (including those related to the physical environment in which education and training takes place) on which the Malta Qualifications Council aims at designing the various policies to ensure:

- accountability and improvement of vocational education and training within Malta's NQF that quality assurance is an integral part of the internal management of training institutions
- regular internal and external evaluation of training institutions by themselves or by designated bodies and agencies
- that MQC and other external bodies and agencies themselves are subject to quality assurance, and
- that quality assurance includes content, sectoral skills, key competences, management, assessment and certification structures and all learning outcomes.

This document must be seen as a first guide towards a comprehensive and nationally agreed policy for quality assurance in vocational education and training. It proposes a brand QVET MALTA which will eventually signify the adherence of all training institutions in Malta and Gozo towards common standards and quality assurance mechanisms. Finally it delves into the specific role that MQC should play in this process and how quality assurance should be communicated to all stakeholders.

It is the intention of MQC to ensure that there is a strong commitment, by itself and by all other institutions providing vocational education and training, towards transparency and communication. Access to information and guidance will be the pillars upon which Malta's vocational education and training will achieve excellence in all its diverse sectors.

The document emphasizes that Quality Assurance in VET is crucial for ensuring that any qualifications, local or international offered in Malta respect agreed and established standards by MQC. The volume highlights that any nationally agreed accreditation provided by MQC adheres to QA standards that can carry currency beyond our shores. QA is seen as the heart of the whole accreditation process of VET qualifications. In presenting a detailed diagrammatic outline of the accreditation process, MQC plans to actively involve industry as well as learners as indicators and beneficiaries of QA.

The general policy on quality assurance focused on vocational education and training is a first national attempt towards building a constructive dialogue which will ensure that Malta becomes a leader in providing quality education and training within and beyond our shores.

I.0 Quality Assurance: A conceptual Framework for Lifelong Learning

It is the government's and every citizen's vision to make our country a better place to live in, with a high standard of our quality of life in all aspects for present as well as for future generations. It is government's policy to work towards making Malta a country *that translates itself into a strong and powerful mission, that of securing a future of excellence for (all) and for (our) children*¹. It is a vision that reflects the country's commitment to continue sustaining its efforts to achieve higher standards of living and quality of life for every single person. This vision can only be achieved if we are amongst the most competitive countries in all those sectors that we identify as our areas of expertise, consequently promoting excellence². It is important that we ensure that quality of life and social inclusion are improved and not to allow a deterioration of these aspects at the expense of economic and competitive regeneration. Government continues to value the high social standards, good healthcare and the social protection systems that have been attained over the past years³.

In its quest for excellence Malta also aims to target those new sectors outlined in the strategy "For a Better Quality of Life" (including healthcare, pharmaceuticals, marine-related, international logistics, hi-tech and/or value-added manufacturing, film, and automotive components) which promise to have a strong competitive and growth potential for Malta. It is important to develop a simpler regulatory environment which contributes towards achieving a more attractive business environment for start-ups while facilitating operations for incumbent enterprises. However, of great importance, is the streamlining of existing procedures and the introduction of **quality assurance mechanisms that ensure a better and more efficient** business environment for businesses to operate.

Among government's planned strategies in raising standards and achieving quality, a number of indicators have been identified, namely:

- A supportive framework for enterprise, in terms of both IT infrastructure and administrative support services, that would facilitate business operations and enhance business performance;
- Quality assurance mechanisms across government through the adoption of quality standards;
- Tourism zone management tools to raise quality standards;
- Upgrading the nation's environment in order to ensure an improved quality of life through sustainable development; as well as
- The important role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in improving the quality of life and increasing the competitiveness of the country⁴.

Underpinning all these targets, **ensuring a quality education** is considered essential in achieving these goals. This need for quality education is reflected across all recent government documents⁵. Quality education is considered the key to achieving excellence. Malta's strong educational roots now seek a new space, freedom, and the tools to ensure quality education for all in the coming years. Only a quality leap forward guarantees to present and future generations a full and equitable participation in a healthy democracy and an economy replete of challenges and opportunities⁶. The level and standard of education of individuals

1 Prime Minister's Forward, Securing our Future: pre-budget document 2007, August 2006, p.i

2 Securing our Future: pre-budget document 2007, August 2006

3 Ministry of Competitiveness and Communications, National Reform Programme: Malta's Strategy for Growth and Jobs, October 2005

4 Ibid.

5 One finds a strong emphasis on the provision of quality education in the Pre-budget documents of 2006, 2007, the National Reform Programme, Malta's National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 published in March 2006, as well as education documents such as , For All Children to Succeed: A new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, June 2005

6 Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, For All Children to Succeed: A new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, June 2005

influence the capability and flexibility of a quality workforce and have an impact on the rate of growth of each and every economic activity in any sector. This is crucial when considering Malta's high-value added target sectors which require a highly-skilled and adaptable workforce. Quality education must therefore be ensured at all educational levels from early years to compulsory, vocational, higher and continual professional development levels. This can be achieved through systems of quality assurance that enable institutions to monitor their effectiveness in education provision as well as to indicate areas of weaknesses that need action for improvement.

1.1 The Need for Standards

Quality and excellence can only be achieved through setting and reaching standards. Standards are very important to most aspects of life. This is very much evident in industry. When one purchases a product, it is important for the product to be compatible with other equipment so that it can be used without additional problems. It is also important for the product to be reliable and safe. These factors are all ensured through standards which products and services need to satisfy and which satisfy consumers' needs and safety. Standards in industry encourage raising levels of quality, safety, reliability, efficiency and inter-changeability, all at an economic cost to consumers. Without standardized dimensions, international trade would be slower and more expensive. Lack of standards may also affect the quality of life, such as, for example, disabled persons who, had no standards for wheelchair sizes existed would suffer much more problems of access to buildings than is currently the case. The same argument holds in the case of safety and performance standards.

As the competitive market changes and transforms, so do the type and level of standards required. This demands that workers continually keep up-to-date through training in order to ensure that such standards are maintained. The demographic shift towards more aged workers, combined with the relentless transformative pressures being exerted on industry by global competition and technological change, means that up-skilling workers through part-time education must assume a greater role than before.

A key development required in this regard is the introduction of a National Vocational Qualifications Framework⁷.

A National Vocational Qualifications Framework⁸ brings increased clarity to the meaning of different types of qualifications and would allow qualifications to be compared easily. Together with the associated policies on access, transfer and progression, the introduction of such a framework would allow for wider access to awards, creating additional opportunities for transfer to different programmes and encouraging learners to progress to tertiary education⁹.

However, in ensuring that there is adequate and up-to-date training provision and an up-skilling of workers, there is also a need to set standards and ensure quality within education provision. It is essential for training providers to ensure that any awards and certificates provided include training and acquisition of competences that reflect competences required by industry, follow updated occupational standards, meet the needs and expectations of learners, as well as ensure that all those in the learning process are aware of their roles. This is in line with international developments within the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes for restructuring in higher education and vocational education and training provision which emphasise the importance of quality assurance for promoting comparability, mobility, transparency and mutual trust within and across countries.

There is an ongoing process to improve and upgrade the quality of the educational experience of each and every child. All three-year-old children in Malta have access to kindergarten services. A new National Curriculum inspires a new vision and strategy in primary and secondary schooling. At the same time Government has embarked on a ten-year multi-million project to build the new State schools Malta needs and to modernise and refurbish all other State schools,

⁷ Malta's National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 published in March 2006

⁸ Refer to Publications I and II of the Series Valuing all Learning by MQC, 2007

⁹ Government of Malta, A Better Quality of Life: 2006-2010 Pre-budget document, July 2005

thus transforming all State schools into 'Tomorrow's Schools'. A Vocational College, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), was established whilst a considerable increase was registered in the number of University students¹⁰. These are all signs which indicate that Malta's education sector is set to upgrade its infrastructure and services to a higher level.

1.2 Government's Commitment to Quality Assurance in Education

Government has been involved in an ongoing process to improve and upgrade the quality of the educational experience of each and every child. All three-year-old children in Malta now have access to kindergarten services. A new National Curriculum, in its second edition published in 1999, inspires a new vision and strategy in primary and secondary schooling. Government has also embarked on a ten-year multi-million project to build new state of the art State schools while modernising and refurbishing all other State schools. The Vocational College, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), was established whilst a considerable increase was registered in the number of University students¹¹.

To enhance the quality of educational experience, Government has embarked on a wide-ranging education reform process. During the past decade, emphasis has been placed on issues such as the implementation of the national curriculum, introducing school development plans, promoting inclusion, developing literacy programmes, helping ICT diffusion, as well as talking about quality assurance and accountability as a driver for education improvement. Government has established a National Commission for Higher Education as an advisory commission for the development and transformation of the post-secondary and tertiary sectors. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) has been established to ensure that formal, informal and non-formal qualifications are accredited and certified. Investment in the education sector is being undertaken to overcome a number of challenges¹². The next stage involves ensuring a quality education for each and every child such that s/he will succeed. Quality Education can best be realised by introducing policies to drive school improvement through two separate strands, namely, "High Challenge" and "High Support"¹³. Quality Education can better be realised if at both micro and macro level, educational provision aims at achieving simultaneously a "high excellence, high equity education system"¹⁴

Over the past few years, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment has embarked on a critical analysis of the whole education system. In order to transform and renovate the whole spectrum of Malta's educational services, further changes are proposed with a view to ensuring focused standards setting and external quality assurance mechanisms for all levels and sectors of life-long education¹⁵. This involves focusing on quality assurance at compulsory level of education, vocational education, as well as tertiary education.

1.2.1 Quality Assurance at Compulsory Education Level

At compulsory level of education, the main challenge is that of ensuring quality education for all through better standards setting and quality assurance, and effective and efficient operation of the different educational entities spanning State, Church and private-sector educational institutions¹⁶.

The myriad of educational institutions now in operation, even within the compulsory age

¹⁰ Government of Malta, A Better Quality of Life: 2006-2010 Pre-budget document, July 2005

¹¹ Government of Malta, A Better Quality of Life: 2006-2010 Pre-budget document, July 2005

¹² MALTA – National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013, March 2006

¹³ Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, For All Children to Succeed: A new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, June 2005, Introduction by Permanent Secretary Education.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Government of Malta, 2005, A Better Quality of Life - 2006-2010 Pre-Budget Document, p. 38

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, For All Children to Succeed: A new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, June 2005

education demands effective delivery of support and services, clarity in the process of accountability, better information, communication, ongoing dialogue, planning and more consistent direction, both on a horizontal and vertical basis, than that in place today. In this regard, the Government has recently published its plans for the educational reforms of the compulsory education system in the strategy document titled 'For All Children to Succeed'¹⁷. In essence, the Government's thrust will be directed towards:

- Networking all State primary and secondary schools into a number of autonomous Colleges catering for all levels of education, from early childhood through primary to secondary, to allow for an improved and seamless educational service, **with external evaluation to ensure quality**;
- Providing unified regulation for the whole of the education system - that is State, Church and private schools right up to the compulsory school-leaving age - including that relating to curriculum policies, **auditing and quality assurance**¹⁸;
- Ensuring the effective and timely delivery of the necessary pedagogical, management, operations, and ancillary support, planning and resource allocation; lifelong learning services; and student services;
- Providing, within the context of policy parameters set centrally, a framework for agreed decentralisation of State schools within a networked school environment through the new Colleges.

In fact, Government, in its 2007 pre-budget document, is committed to a move towards further autonomy for State schools and educational institutions together with a stronger regulatory framework for all levels focusing on quality education in each and every class and for each and every student¹⁹. It indicates how a Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education will be set up with the remit of setting educational standards and of being involved in quality assurance of schools at compulsory level.

1.2.2 Quality assurance at further and higher education levels

Government's strategy in working towards a quality education also envisages a framework for education and training outside the compulsory education sector, within a national lifelong learning framework. The setting up of quality assurance and qualification accreditation systems is felt necessary across the entire education sector. It is also felt necessary to create more accessible pathways into education and training at different levels and stages in life²⁰. In line with these plans, the most recent pre-budget documents list among Government's targets those of:

- establishing a framework of national vocational qualifications so as to put vocational education on a sounder and better-structured footing for the benefit of both students and employers²¹;
- Putting in place effective quality control and enforcement of standards on all public and private institutions²².

In setting the targets for the year 2007²³ with respect to further and higher education, one finds specific reference to the importance of improving the quality assurance systems at

¹⁷ Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, For All Children to Succeed: A new Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta, June 2005

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Government of Malta, Securing Our Future: pre-budget document 2007, August 2006

²⁰ MALTA – National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013, March 2006, p51.

²¹ This target has been addressed in Publications I and II of this series Valuing Learning by MQC

²² Government of Malta, A Better Quality of Life: 2006-2010 Pre-budget document, July 2005

²³ Government of Malta, Securing Our Future: pre-budget document 2007, August 2006

these levels of education and training. Strategic measure 5(g)²⁴ includes quality assurance, funding and administrative systems. It is advocated that more accountability is necessary in view of the ever increasing importance in the role of further and higher education outcomes for economic and social sustainability. It is recognised that institution and programme evaluation and accreditation against local recognised standards are the precursor to adequate accountability and flexible funding frameworks. Within this view, government is committed to pursue the following actions:

- Further development of existing internal quality assurance systems in the major public further and higher education institutions in Malta;
- The training of staff for the implementation and running of the quality assurance programmes (both for internal and external quality assurance programmes);
- The financing of external evaluation and accreditation by selected quality assurance agencies within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

There is specific reference for further development of an embedded quality assurance programme within MCAST, ITS and the University of Malta and requires further development of existing processes, systems, staff training, management and implementation of this function and the reporting of outcomes. It is also highlighted that additional external evaluations need to occur within a broader quality assurance framework²⁵.

Government is also committed to introduce regulation and demand for quality assurance structures even within the private further and higher education institutions that exist in Malta. It is government's intention to promote the expansion of private further and higher education services in Malta and thus intends to develop a framework to encourage more private provision and consumption of higher education. There are to be recommendations to be put forward for approval of external evaluation and accreditation of private institutions and the programmes they provide²⁶.

1.3 An International Commitment to Quality Assurance

A reference and commitment to the importance of quality assurance in education can be found in both the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes. In both cases, when tackling the issue of comparability, transparency and mutual trust, all these are based on the provision of quality assurance systems which ensure adequate quality and level of the training provided.

1.3.1 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

One finds reference to quality assurance in the Bologna Process from its inception. The Bologna Declaration²⁷ refers to promoting European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. The Prague Communiqué²⁸ encouraged European cooperation in quality assurance as Ministers recognized the vital role that quality assurance systems play in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. They also encouraged closer cooperations between recognition and quality assurance networks. Ministers called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with corresponding bodies from countries which are not

24 Ibid. p.45

25 Ibid. p.46

26 Ibid. p.46 (h).

27 Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education (1999), The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

28 Communiqué of the meeting of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, Towards the European Higher Education Area, Prague, 19th May 2001, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

members of ENQA, to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practices²⁹.

As work on quality assurance in higher education progressed with the contribution of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the importance of quality assurance was again emphasised in the Berlin Communiqué³⁰. Ministers agreed to strengthen their efforts to promote effective quality assurance systems among other priorities set. There was agreement that the quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. This can be achieved through the development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. There was consensus on the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. These criteria however need also to be consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education resting with each institution itself, providing the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

In the Berlin Communiqué³¹ it was agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results;
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures; and
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

ENQA was asked to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies.

The Ministers meeting in Bergen in 2005³² acknowledged that most countries had made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, it was felt that further progress could be made, in particular with regards to greater student involvement as well as international cooperation. They urged higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance. Mutually recognized quality assurance systems were considered to facilitate students' access to the European labour market and enhance the compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. As part of the stock-taking exercise for the meeting in London in 2007, Ministers charged the Follow-up Group with continuing stocktaking based on, among other things, quality assurance and recognition of degrees and study periods, with the aim that by 2007 most countries would have largely completed the implementation of these three intermediate priorities, one of which involves the implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report³³.

29 *ibid.*

30 Communiqué of the conference of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, Realising the European Higher Education Area, Berlin 19th September 2003, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

31 *ibid.*

32 Communiqué of the conference of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, The European Higher Education Area—Achieving the goals, Bergen 19-20th May 2005, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

33 European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005

1.3.2 Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and the recognition of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

Quality assurance has also been considered important in the Copenhagen Process as part of the restructuring of Vocational Education and Training in Europe in reaching the Lisbon targets.

The main objectives set by the Copenhagen declaration included developing and promoting:

- A single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences;
- Cooperation in quality assurance in VET.

Concurrent to the Copenhagen Declaration³⁴, the lifelong learning Council Resolution³⁵ in promoting the effective validation and recognition of formal qualifications as well as non-formal and informal learning, across countries and educational sectors, emphasised the need for increased transparency and better quality assurance in the process.

The Copenhagen Declaration, involving the social partners, the EEA-EFTA countries and the candidate countries, and the Council Resolution on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training³⁶ gave priority to promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training. Both the Copenhagen Declaration and the Council Resolution identified certain concrete outputs in the fields of quality assurance, transparency and recognition, in order to improve the overall performance and attractiveness of VET and to foster mobility. The Resolution invited the Member States and the Commission to take the appropriate steps necessary to implement these priorities, building on and adapting relevant structures and instruments.

The Maastricht Communiqué³⁷ in 2004 further recognised the need for quality assurance in the way forward towards a European dimension to vocational education. In stating the priorities for the following two years, one finds reference to the development of common instruments, references and principles to support the reform and development of VET systems and practices, for example regarding transparency (Europass), guidance throughout life, quality assurance and identification and validation of non-formal. There was emphasis on the need for the increased relevance and quality of VET through the systematic involvement of all key partners in developments at national, regional and local level, particularly regarding quality assurance. This emphasis was coupled with the need for early identification of skills needs and planning of VET provision in collaboration with key partners, including employers, trainers and other social partners. A framework underpinned by a set of common reference levels and supported by instruments agreed at European level, particularly with reference to quality assurance mechanisms for promoting the necessary mutual trust, were encouraged.

An outcome of subsequent cooperative work between the Commission, the Member States, social partners, the EEA – EFTA and the candidate countries on the Quality Assurance priority, was the development of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)³⁸. This framework was developed through stock taking experiences in and across Member States and aims to provide a basis and support for Member States in developing and improving their existing

34 Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

“The Copenhagen Declaration,” http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf

35 Official Journal of the European Communities, COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning (2002/C 163/01)

36 The Council of the European Union, 12658/02 EDUC 114 SOC 412 Subject : Draft Council Resolution on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, 18 October 2002

37 Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training, Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), 14th December 2004, Maastricht

38 This framework will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter

national or regional systems and approaches to quality assurance. It also aims to help Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems and practices.

Council conclusions on quality assurance³⁹ put forward a number of priorities that needed to be considered at both national and international level and to work towards developing a common European quality assurance framework in the context of the Copenhagen declaration. Such a framework is to include:

- an appropriate model to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in Member States;
- an appropriate methodology for review of systems, for example self-assessment, to enable Member States at the appropriate level to be self-critical and strive for continued improvements;
- monitoring as appropriate at national or regional level, possibly combined with voluntary peer review; and
- measurement tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

The same document stressed that a CQAF can contribute to increasing transparency and consistency between Member States' policy initiatives, while fully respecting their responsibility for the development of their own systems. It was argued that a CQAF constituted an appropriate common European framework and systematic approach to quality assurance in order to meet the above objectives and needs. It could help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing models work, to share best practice and to improve quality systems, on the basis of common understandings. The potential of the framework for policy decision-making in the field of quality assurance in VET was considered to be particularly relevant in countries where quality systems are not explicitly developed.

The Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies, were invited⁴⁰ to:

- promote a CQAF on a voluntary basis while making best use of existing and future national and Community policy instruments;
- develop, together with the relevant stakeholders, practical initiatives in order to assess its added value in improving national or regional systems;
- coordinate activities at national and regional level between the main actors responsible for VET in order to encourage coherence with the Copenhagen Declaration and the Joint Interim Report;
- promote the creation of cooperative and voluntary networks on an experimental basis. This will enable the trans-national exchanges of best practices based on the current and future generations of education and training programmes;
- explore where appropriate the use of common measurement tools, to assist Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

The most recent Helsinki Communiqué gives more space and importance to the development of quality assurance within the vocational education and training sector. Among the reviewed priorities one finds reference to, among other things, national quality assurance and improve-

³⁹ Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 18 May 2004, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/vetquality_en.pdf

⁴⁰ Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 18 May 2004, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/vetquality_en.pdf

ment in line with the Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance. This is further reflected in outlining work with respect to the development and implementation of common tools for VET in order to pave the way towards a European area of VET and to support the competitiveness of the European labour market. The aim should be for the agreed tools to be in place by 2010 specifically to strengthen cooperation on quality improvement by using the European Network of Quality Assurance for VET (ENQA-VET) to support the creation of a common understanding on quality assurance and to foster mutual trust. Cooperation with higher education should be continued.

1.3.3 Quality Assurance and the European Qualifications Framework

Quality assurance (QA) is considered as a very important context in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)⁴¹. One finds reference to the need to develop a set of common principles and procedures providing guidelines for co-operation between stakeholders at different levels – in particular focusing on quality assurance, validation, guidance and key competences. It is also advocated that EQF is to function as a common reference for quality assurance and development in education and training.

Quality assurance is considered a crucial dimension of the proposed European Qualifications Framework. It is stated⁴² that there must be a commitment to a set of common principles as a precondition for co-operation between stakeholders at different levels.

It is acknowledged by the Commission that quality assurance should remain a prerogative of the different countries with quality assurance systems set up at national level in order to ensure improvement and accountability of education and training. The aim underlying systems should be that of increasing the effectiveness and transparency of provision at all levels and thereby promote mutual trust, recognition and mobility, within and across countries. It is understood that quality assurance deals with provision and learning outcomes and may not necessarily guarantee improved quality. This is the responsibility of those providing education and training. Quality Assurance may however provide important support to these providers.

The EQF consultative document makes it clear that Member States, institutions and relevant stakeholders remain fully responsible for the definition of QA policies, systems and procedures. It is understood that these vary across sectors and levels according to societal constructions, specific contexts and institutional environments. Nonetheless, given the diversity and complexity of quality assurance approaches within and across Member States, it is felt necessary to improve the transparency and consistency of policy and practical developments in this field.

⁴¹ Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

⁴² *ibid.*

Quality Assurance Framework at each level of qualification	
8	Quality assurance is largely determined by expert peer review coupled with institutional procedural requirements.
7	Quality assurance at this level is largely determined by expert peer evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements.
6	Quality assurance is largely determined by expert evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements usually involving third party review.
5	Quality assurance is largely determined by expert evaluation coupled with institutional procedural requirements.
4	Quality assurance at level 4 is largely determined by expert review that is based on institutional or sector based agreements.
3	Educational and sectoral regulatory bodies determine quality assurance of qualifications at level 3.
2	Education and training regulatory bodies determine quality assurance of formal qualifications at level 2.
1	Education and training regulatory bodies operate quality assurance systems on formal qualifications at level 1.

Table 1: Quality Assurance Frameworks referred to in the EQF Commission Document

In defining the EQF levels in terms of competences and work level and responsibilities, one also finds reference to the desired quality assurance systems that are in play at each of the 8 levels of qualifications. Quality assurance underpins the level of qualifications issued relating to transparency, comparability and mutual trust. The first three levels, which nationally are equivalent to the successful completion of compulsory education⁴³, indicate clearly and specifically, the need for quality assurance to be determined by regulatory bodies. Such bodies have the role to outline the basic principles needed when issuing qualifications at these levels. Levels 4 and 5 give room to more institutional autonomy, but indicate clearly the need for both internal and external quality assurance systems. This does not mean that nationally agreed quality assurance systems are not required. On the contrary, they are crucial to ensure that all training and qualifications within a country include key aspects⁴⁴ essential to quality assurance such that there can be mutual trust and comparability of qualifications, ensuring that learners are provided with the best possible training.

1.4 Agreement on the need for Quality Assurance

The review shows the general agreement on national and international levels for the need to ensure quality assurance in education provision. There is commitment to the development and improvement of quality assurance structures at all levels, including vocational education qualifications in promoting vocational education and working towards improving comparability of esteem with tertiary education in the quest of achieving the Lisbon target of making Europe the first as a knowledge society.

⁴³ Details are provided in publications I and II of the series Valuing All Learning by MQC

⁴⁴ The proposed key elements to quality assurance in VET are to be reviewed in the next chapter

2.0 Quality Assurance for Vocational Education

Quality assurance is of great importance for vocational education qualifications in Malta for a number of reasons. Any qualification issued needs to reflect actual economic needs within the labour market as well as be transparent in the processes of development, implementation and assessment in order to have value for learners and for employers both locally as well as within the European labour market.

The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) is the national body in Malta responsible for the development, assessment, certification and accreditation of qualifications other than those in compulsory education and degrees. MQC is thus directly interested in promoting national quality assurance systems to ensure the quality, comparability, transparency and mutual trust of national vocational qualifications which it recognizes and accredits whether locally or internationally based.

The Malta Qualifications Council was set up in October 2005 by Legal Notice 347 and members of the Council were appointed by the Minister of Education, Youth and Employment in December 2005.

The specific functions of the MQC⁴⁵ are:

1. to establish and maintain a qualifications framework for the development, accreditation and award of professional and vocational qualifications, other than degrees, based on standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes to be acquired by learners;
2. to promote and facilitate life-long learning access, transfer and progression;
3. to foster the recognition abroad of professional and vocational certificates awarded in Malta;
4. to promote and maintain the National Qualifications Framework and establish the policies and criteria on which the Framework shall be based;
5. to approve and ensure the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and attitudes for each development sector;
6. to endorse and ensure the publication of the procedures to be implemented by training agencies offering programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression;
7. to ensure that such standards and procedures are implemented;
8. to endorse vocational education and training programmes delivered by training agencies;
9. to endorse certificates awarded by training agencies; and
10. to keep and issue official records of certificates awarded;

Working in partnership with people in education, industry, commerce and government, MQC aims at developing qualifications and quality support measures which are relevant to the personal and professional development of the individual, to the labour market and the economic growth of Malta and Gozo. MQC is also striving to ensure that qualifications are as flexible as possible and that such qualifications are accredited and pegged to the National Qualifications Framework and can be taken in public and private vocational education and training contexts, workplaces and training centres.

It is within this remit that the Malta Qualifications Council is putting forward this policy document which is to steer the way to the quality assurance systems that are to be implemented within institutions and for programmes leading to vocational education qualifications.

In proposing a framework for quality assurance for vocational qualifications in Malta, it is worth looking at other models of quality assurance. Quality assurance forms an integral part of indus-

⁴⁵ <http://www.mqc.gov.mt/index.asp>

try and it is standards and quality assurance protocols that factories adhere to, which enable consumers to have good, reliable and safe products. Quality assurance has also been an important issue of discussion within the tertiary education institutions in the quest for establishing a European Higher Education Area. A European model promoting key quality assurance features for vocational education has been developed. A review of these different perspectives has led the Malta Qualifications Council to develop and propose a framework for quality assurance within the vocational education sector in Malta.

2.1 The model of Quality Assurance in Industry

The importance of standards is crucial to industry, particularly in the manufacturing aspect, but also within the services sector. There exist international organisations that set and regulate standards achieved within industry to ensure that consumers are provided with quality items. Two main international organisations setting standards include:

- **The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)**⁴⁶: This is the world's greatest developer of standards. Its principal activity is the development of technical standards. However, its standards have also important economic and social repercussions as they provide a positive difference to society;
- **European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)**⁴⁷: This is not for profit membership foundation and is the primary source for organisations in Europe looking to excel in their market and in their business. Founded in 1989 by the CEOs of prominent European businesses, EFQM is now the hub of excellent, globally-minded organisations of all sizes and sectors, and both private and public. The EFQM Excellence Model provides a framework for assessing organisations for the European Quality Award and is the most widely used organisational framework in Europe.

2.1.1 The ISO System

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is a network of the national standards institutes of 157 countries on the basis of one member per country, with a central secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, that coordinates the system. ISO occupies a position between public and private sectors and is able to act as a bridging organisation in which a consensus can be reached on solutions that meet both the requirements of business and the broader needs of society, such as the needs of stakeholder groups like consumers and users.

ISO began in the electro-technical field and was mainly focused on mechanical engineering in order to facilitate the coordination and unification of industrial standards. The industry-wide standardisation meant consensus on specifications and criteria to be applied consistently in the classification of materials, in the manufacture of products, in testing and analysis, in terminology, and in the provision of services.

Standards are beneficial for society in different ways. Businesses which act as suppliers can adopt these international standards in the development of their products and services allowing them to compete on many markets worldwide. Customers can have worldwide compatibility of technology which allows a wide choice of products and consequently can benefit from competitive prices. Governments can also ensure health and safety standards as well as allow political trade agreements to be reached. They provide guidance to decisions when companies decide to invest in developing countries. They can also influence and change industrial practice, particularly with respect to environmental issues. All these aspects combined lead to a better quality of life and to higher standards in the quality of the product and the well being of employees and customers.

There are certain characteristics as to how these international standards develop and are regulated. In order to encourage equal influence, each country can have one member with one sin-

⁴⁶ <http://www.iso.org/iso/en/ISOonline.frontpage>

⁴⁷ <http://www.efqm.org/>

gle vote, whatever the size of the country, giving each country equal footing on strategic as well as technical content. ISO standards are:

- **Voluntary:** in that it has no legal authority to enforce the implementation of its standards. However, they may become a market requirement;
- **Market-driven:** Experts from the industrial, technical and business sector develop the standards in collaboration with representatives of government agencies, consumer organisations, academia and testing bodies;
- **Consensus:** These standards are voluntary and are agreed among interested parties through consensus, allowing the widespread applicability of standards;
- **Worldwide:** These standards are developed through numerous technical groups and their applications are recognized on a wide international scale.

ISO 9000

The vast majority of ISO standards are highly specific to a particular product. ISO 9000 is concerned with 'quality management'. This refers to what the organisation does to enhance customer satisfaction by meeting customer and applicable regulatory requirements and to continually improve its performance in this regard. The ISO 9000 is generic in that the standards can be applied to any organisation, whatever its size, line of activity or whether it is a business enterprise, a public administration or government department.

Within ISO 9000, the concept of 'management system' refers to an organisation's structure for managing its processes or activities such as satisfying customers' quality requirements, complying to regulations or meeting environmental objectives.

ISO 9000:2000 series is based on eight quality management systems⁴⁸ which can be adopted by senior managers as a framework to guide their organisations towards improved performance. These principles include:

- **Customer Focus:** Since any organisation depends on its customers/consumers, it is important that they should understand that their current and future needs should meet customer requirements and strive to exceed customer expectations. The organisation should thus be involved in activities such as: researching and understanding customer needs and expectations, ensuring that organisation objectives are linked to customer needs and expectations; communicating these needs across all the organisation, measuring customer satisfaction, systematically managing customer relationships as well as ensuring a balanced approach between satisfying customers and other interested partners such as employees, suppliers, local communities and society as a whole;
- **Leadership:** It is important for leaders to establish unity and direction within the organisation and maintain a working environment which allows the organisation to achieve its objectives. Leadership leads to considering the needs of all interested parties including customers, owners, employees, suppliers, financiers, local communities and society as a whole; establishing a clear vision of the organisation's future; setting challenges and targets; creating and sustaining shared values, fairness and ethical role models at all levels of the organisation; establishing trust and eliminating fear; providing people with the required resources, training and freedom to act with responsibility and accountability; as well as inspiring, encouraging and recognising people's contributions;
- **Involvement of People:** People at all levels of the organisation are considered important and their full involvement benefits the organisation. Applying the principle of involvement of people involves: having people realising the importance of their role and contribution to the organisation; identifying constraints of their performance; accepting ownership of problems and work towards solving them; evaluating performance against their personal

48 <http://www.iso.org/iso/en/iso9000-14000/understand/gmp.html>

goals and objectives; seeking opportunities to enhance their competence, knowledge, and experience, promote sharing of knowledge and experience, as well as discuss problems and issues openly;

- **Process Approach:** A process approach allows an efficient management of activities and resources. This principle leads to systematically defining the activities necessary to obtain a desired result; establishing clear responsibility and accountability for managing of key activities; analysing and measuring of the capability of key activities; identifying the key activities within and between the functions of the organisation; focusing on the factors such as resources, methods and materials that will improve key activities of the organisation as well as evaluating risks, consequences and impacts on customers, suppliers and other interested parties;
- **System Approach to Management:** It is important for organisations to identify, understand and manage interrelated processes as an effective and efficient system. This implies that the management system is structured: to achieve the organisation's objectives in the most effective and efficient way; to understand the interdependency between the processes within the system; to have harmonised and integrated processes; to provide better understanding of the roles and responsibilities necessary for achieving common objectives and thereby reduce cross-functional barriers; to understand organisational capabilities and establish resource constraints prior to action; to target how specific activities within a system should operate; and continually to improve the system through measurement and evaluation;
- **Continual Improvement:** Any organisation should have continual improvement as a permanent objective. This implies that any organisation is to employ a consistent organisation-wide approach to continual improvement; provide people with training in the methods and tools for improvement; make continual improvement tools for every individual in the organisation; establish goals to guide and measures to track continual improvement; and recognise and acknowledge improvements;
- **Factual Approach to Decision Making:** Any organisation should strive to make decisions on the analysis of data and information such that it can take informed decisions and to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of past decisions through records. Organisation therefore should work towards ensuring that data and information are sufficiently accurate and reliable; make data accessible to those who need it; analyse data and information using valid methods; make decisions taking into account factual analysis balanced with experience and intuition; and
- **Mutually Beneficial Supplier Relationships:** Value is created when there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and its suppliers. It promotes increased speed of joint responses to changing market or customer needs and expectations as well as optimisation of costs and resources. There should be established relationships that balance short-term gains with long-term considerations; pooling expertise and resources with partners; identifying and selecting key suppliers; clear and open communication; sharing information and future plans; establishing joint development and improvement activities; as well as inspiring and recognising improvements and achievements by suppliers.

There are many ways in which such principles can be implemented. These tend to be determined by the type and nature of activity in which the organisation is involved. Many organisation stands to benefit from setting up management systems based on these principles.

2.1.2 The EFQM model of excellence⁴⁹

Regardless of sector, size or structure, organisations need to establish an appropriate management framework if they want to be successful. The EFQM model offers a framework for assessing organisations for the European Quality Award and is now the most widely used organisational framework in Europe.

⁴⁹ <http://www.efqm.org/Default.aspx?tabid=35>

The EFQM excellence model is flexible and can be applied to any organisation. It can be used as a tool for self-assessment; to benchmark with other organisations; to identify areas of improvement; to be used as a common vocabulary and way of thinking, as well as a structure for the organisation's management system. It is based on nine criteria, five of which are enablers, covering what the organisation does, while the remaining four are 'results' criteria covering what the organisation achieves. Results are the products of enablers, and enablers are improved using feedback from results.

There are a number of fundamental concepts on which the EFQM model is based. It is essential for organisations to be comfortable with these concepts if they want to maximise the benefits of the excellence model. These principles are not exhaustive and can change as excellence in management grows and changes in its quest to reach and maintain excellence.

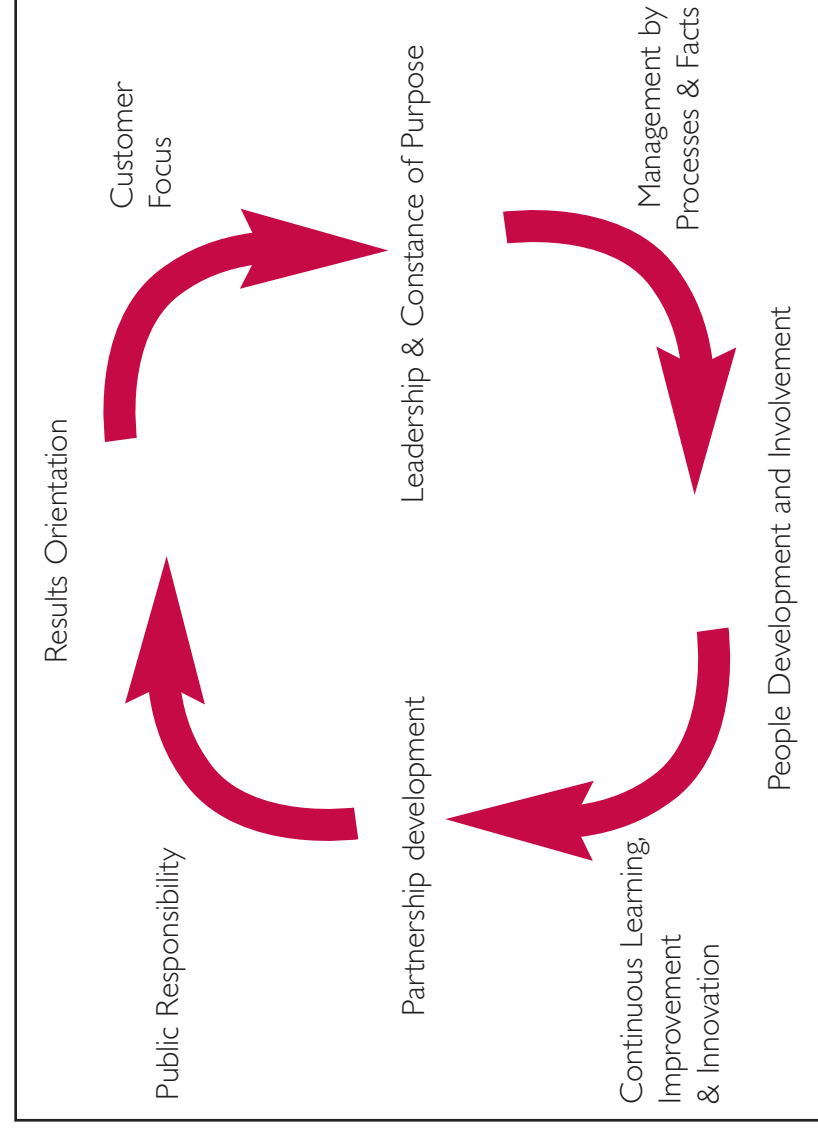


Fig. 1 Representation of Management Fundamental Concepts in EFQM⁵⁰

The fundamental concepts include:

- **Results Orientation:** A measure of excellence involves achieving results that delight all the organisation's stakeholders;
- **Customer Focus:** Excellence involves creating a sustainable customer value;
- **Leadership and Constancy of Purpose:** Excellence is considered to include a mixture of visionary and inspirational leadership combined with constancy of purpose;
- **Management of Processes and Facts:** Excellence is achieved through managing the organisation through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts;
- **People Development and Involvement:** In Excellence, employees maximise their contribution through their development and involvement;
- **Continuous Learning, Innovation and Improvement:** Excellence means challenging the status quo and effecting change by utilising learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities;

⁵⁰ Adapted from <http://www.efqm.org/Default.aspx?tabid=36>

- **Partnership Development:** Organisations seeking excellence are continually developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships;
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Excellence involves exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organisation operates and to strive to understand and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders in society.

All these concepts are fundamental for any organisation aiming to achieve excellence in whatever it does. The relationship of these principles is dynamic and involves a continual development, evaluation and upgrading of the organisation in its management, services provided and relationships with clients as well as with society as a whole.

2.2 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

There is an increasing interest in quality and standards all over the world as a consequence of the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and private purse. If Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world⁵¹, then higher education institutions need to demonstrate that they are capable of delivering high quality programmes and awards. This can be demonstrated through the development of a European dimension of quality assurance. In view of this need, the Ministers of the Bologna Process had, in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003, invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in collaboration with other key players, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore having a peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies. In response to this request, ENQA has developed a set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area⁵².

These guidelines provide results and recommendations on European standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies. The consistency of quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHA) will be improved through the widespread application of these standards. A number of fundamental interests were taken into consideration during the process of developing these guidelines. These principles included continually keeping in mind:

- the interests of students as well as employers and society more generally in good quality higher education;
- the central importance of institutional autonomy combined with a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibility;
- the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose but to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its goals.

The purpose of a European dimension of quality assurance is that of promoting mutual trust and to improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas⁵³. The primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education still lies with each institution. This provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

The guidelines for internal and external quality assurance are based on a number of basic principles, these being:

- providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;

⁵¹ Lisbon Strategy

⁵² European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2005, Helsinki

⁵³ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2005, Helsinki

- the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;
- the quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA;
- there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported;
- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;
- there should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;
- processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money;
- quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;
- institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;
- processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation⁵⁴.

External quality assurance will serve to safeguard national academic standards, serve as a tool for the accreditation of programmes and/or institutions, protect users, provide independent verified information as well as lead to improvement and enhancement. There are 7 main standards identified for internal quality assurance while there are 8 standards to be followed for external quality assurance.

2.2.1 Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education⁵⁵

The seven standards identified for internal quality assurance target all the aspects and processes involved in the inception, delivery, evaluation and assessment of programmes that lead to qualifications. These standards include:

- **Policy and procedures for quality assurance:** Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. Institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders in the process. The policy statement is to include the relationship between teaching and research in the institution, its strategy for quality and standards, the organisation of the quality assurance system, the responsibilities of the departments, schools, faculties and other units and individuals for quality assurance; the involvement of students in quality assurance, as well as the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised.
- **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:** Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards. The quality assurance of programmes and awards should require the development and publication of intended learning outcomes; careful attention be given to curriculum and programme design and content, identification of the different modes of delivery, availability of appropriate learning resources, monitoring of the progress and achievement of students, regular periodic reviews of programmes which include external panel members, regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives etc., as well as the participation of students.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.13

⁵⁵ Information in these two sections has been extracted from the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area published by ENQA

- **Assessment of students:** Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently. It is stated that desirable assessment procedures are to be designed in order to measure learning outcomes, be appropriate for their purposes, have clear published criteria for marking, be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the students' progression towards the intended qualification, where possible not rely on single examiner judgement, take account of all consequences of examination regulations, have regular regulation covering student illness, absence etc., and be subject to administrative verification to ensure accuracy of their performance.
- **Quality assurance of teaching staff:** Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that the staff teaching students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports. Teaching staff should have the knowledge and understanding of the subject that they are to teach, and the necessary skills and experience to transmit it effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts. Teaching staff should also be encouraged and provided with opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity.
- **Learning resources and student support:** Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered. Resources may vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors, and counsellors. Such resources should be easily accessible to students. Institutions should regularly monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to students.
- **Information systems:** Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities. Information systems should be able to keep records of student progression and success rates, employability of graduates, students' satisfaction with their programmes, effectiveness of teachers, profile of the student population, learning resources available and their costs as well as the institution's own key performance indicators.
- **Public information:** Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering. They have the responsibility to provide information about the programmes they are offering, the intended learning outcomes, the qualification awarded, the learning and assessment procedures used, as well as the learning opportunities offered to students.

Many of these standards may be already ingrained in many University's administrative systems. The development of internal quality assurance is needed to make sure that all institutions have these systems developed, are conscious of their role in ensuring quality and in having them regularly reviewed with the aim of keeping up to date with the needs and requirements of the academic world as well as the labour market which receives their graduates.

2.2.2 External Quality Assurance

In order to ensure quality and promote transparency, it is important to couple external together with internal quality assurance. Whereas internal quality assurance needs to be an integral part of an institution, it is necessary to have regular external quality assurance from external agencies in order to ensure that the internal quality assurance structure is really enabling the higher education institution to keep up to national and international standards. The standards proposed for external quality assurance refer to eight aspects. These are the:

- **Use of internal quality assurance procedures:** External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guideline;
- **Development of external quality assurance processes:** The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used;

- **Criteria for decisions:** Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently;
- **Processes fit for purpose:** All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them. It is important for higher education institutions to insist on the competence of the experts carrying out the quality assurance exercise. This can be achieved by inviting international peers to participate, as well as other actors such as students;
- **Reporting:** Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find;
- **Follow-up procedures:** Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently;
- **Periodic reviews:** External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance;
- **System-wide analyses:** Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

A combination of internal and external quality assurance will act as the basis on which higher education institutions can claim the level of quality of their awards and qualifications on both a national and international level. It is only through adequate quality assurance structures that Europe can really become a knowledge-driven society.

2.3 A European Quality Assurance Framework for VET

Quality assurance was recognised as essential in vocational education straight from the beginning in the Copenhagen Declaration⁵⁶. The need for quality assurance in vocational education was again recognised by the Council Resolution of 2002⁵⁷, on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, giving priority to ‘Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.’ In identifying priorities, emphasis was placed on the importance of concrete outputs in the fields of quality assurance, transparency and recognition, in order to improve the overall performance and attractiveness of VET and to foster mobility. The Resolution invited the Member States and the Commission to take the appropriate steps necessary to implement these priorities, building on and adapting relevant structures and instruments.

Following the Resolution and as an outcome of subsequent cooperative work between the Commission, the Member States, social partners, the EEA – EFTA and the candidate countries on the Quality Assurance priority, a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) has been since developed and outlined. This Common Quality Assurance Framework was developed through stock taking experiences in and across Member States. The framework was designed to provide a basis and support for Member States when developing and improving their existing national or regional systems and approaches to quality assurance. It was also developed with the aim to help Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems and practices.

⁵⁶ Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training

⁵⁷ The Copenhagen Declaration” http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf

⁵⁷ The Council of the European Union, 12658/02 EDUC 114 SOC 412 Subject : Draft Council Resolution on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, 18 October 2002

The Joint Interim Report⁵⁸ identifies as a priority the definition of a Common Quality Assurance Framework in the context of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration. The Draft Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training⁵⁹ state that such a framework should include the following integrated elements:

- An appropriate model to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in Member States;
- An appropriate methodology for review of systems, for example self assessment, to enable Member States at the appropriate level to be self critical and strive for continued improvements;
- Monitoring as appropriate at national or regional level, possibly combined with voluntary peer review; and
- Measurement tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

The document also stressed a number of other issues, namely that:

- a CQAF can contribute to increasing transparency and consistency between Member States' policy initiatives, while fully respecting their responsibility for the development of their own systems;
- the objectives set in VET policy should focus on the improvement and evaluation of the results of VET in terms of increasing employability, improving the match between demand and supply, and better access to lifelong training, in particular for vulnerable people;
- there is need for Member States to analyse the effectiveness and attractiveness of their VET systems and for them to strengthen the links between their education and training system and working life⁶⁰.

It is argued that the CQAF will thus constitute an appropriate common European framework and systematic approach to quality assurance in order to meet the above objectives and needs. It will be considered able to help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing models work, to share best practice and to improve quality systems, on the basis of common understandings. The potential of such a framework will also be valuable for policy decision-making in the field of quality assurance in VET in countries where quality systems are not as yet explicitly developed.

The Draft Council Conclusions consequently invited the Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies, to keep on working further on quality assurance in vocational education through:

- promoting a CQAF on a voluntary basis while making best use of existing and future national and Community policy instruments;
- developing, together with the relevant stakeholders, practical initiatives in order to assess its added value in improving national or regional systems;
- coordinating activities at national and regional level between the main actors responsible for VET in order to encourage coherence with the Copenhagen Declaration and the Joint Interim Report;

⁵⁸ Joint Education Council/Commission report on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy: 'Education and Training 2010: the success of Lisbon hinges on urgent reforms', 26 February 2004

⁵⁹ The Council of the European Union, 9174/04 100 SOC 219, Draft Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 17 May 2004

⁶⁰ The Council of the European Union, 9174/04 100 SOC 219, Draft Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 17 May 2004

- promoting the creation of cooperative and voluntary networks on an experimental basis to enable the trans-national exchanges of best practices based on the current and future generations of education and training programmes; and
- exploring the appropriate use of common measurement tools, as well as assisting Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

2.3.1 The CQAF model proposed for VET in Europe

The CQAF⁶¹ is a European reference framework developed by the VET technical working group to ensure and develop quality in VET. It builds on the key principles of the most relevant existing quality assurance models. Such instrument can help policy makers and practitioners to:

- get a better insight of how the existing QA models work;
- identify areas of provision that need improvement;
- take decisions on how to improve them based on common quantitative and qualitative references; and
- capture and classify best practice within and across Member States.

The CQAF can be applied at both the system and VET provider levels and can therefore be used to assess the effectiveness of VET. It gives particular emphasis to the improvement and evaluation of the ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes’ of VET in terms of increasing employability, the match between demand and supply, and access to lifelong training, in particular for disadvantaged people⁶².

The technical group⁶³ defined the CQAF to be:

- **a model** which facilitates planning, implementation, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels;
- **a methodology** for assessment and review of systems, involving both self assessment as well as external evaluation;
- **a monitoring system** that can be applied at national or regional level, and which can possibly also be combined with voluntary peer review at European level; and
- **a measurement tool** involving a set of reference indicators aiming at facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of systems at national or regional levels.

Quality assurance in vocational education within the CQAF model is considered to involve a continual process, leading to ongoing evolution of better quality and reflects emerging labour market needs. The CQAF is based on four main but interrelated elements: planning; implementation; evaluation and assessment; and review. These elements are interdependent and considered as essential elements to any quality assurance system in the variety of VET training systems and institutions across Europe.

⁶¹ European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET in Europe

⁶² European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance

⁶³ *Ibid.*

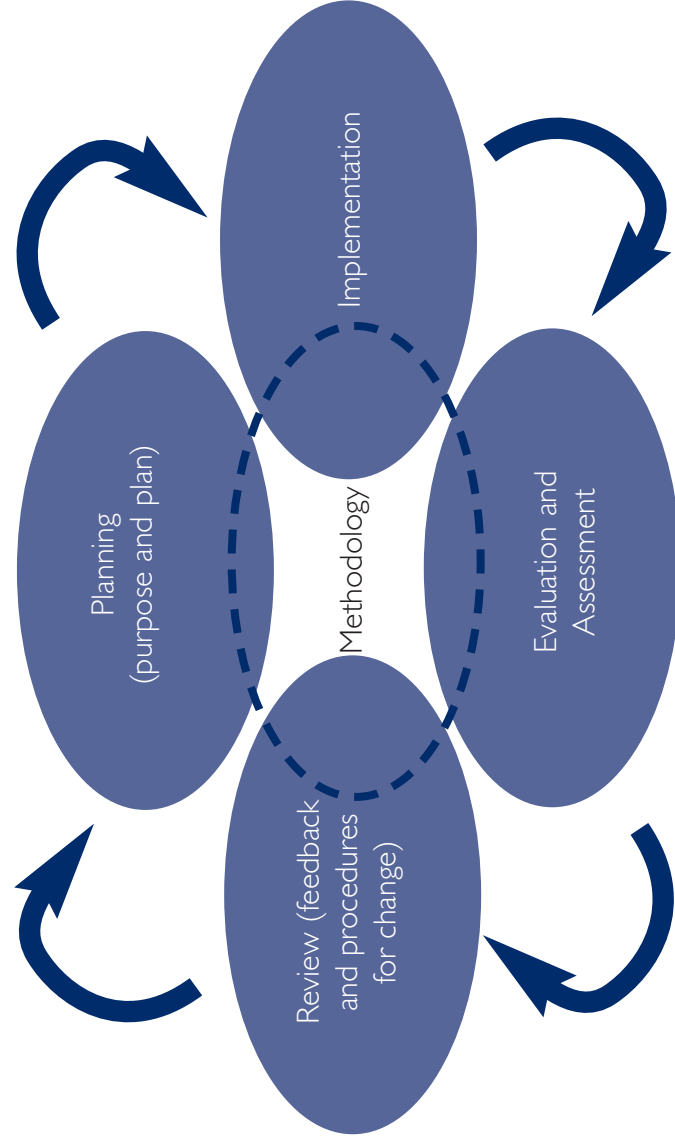


Fig. 2 Graphical Representation of the CQAF model Planning (purpose and plan)

This aspect of quality assurance relates to the setting up of clear and measurable goals regarding policies, procedures, tasks, and human resources as well as to defining input and output standards linked with the design and implementation of the vocational training provided. This is an essential reference point for certification of individuals or the accreditation of VET institutions and/or programmes. Goals and objectives should be formulated in clearly understandable terms and as far as possible be combined with definitions of measurable indicators which enable measurement of achievement in later stages. It is crucial that relevant national, regional and local stakeholders take part in the decision-making process on goals and objectives concerning the quality of VET. The table illustrates key questions that can be set with respect to quality assurance at the planning phase.

Key Questions	Possible answers System level	Possible answers VET-provider level
Are your policy goals/objectives clear and measurable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and European goals for VET are known to stakeholders. Systematic procedures to identify future needs exist. Minimum objectives/standards have been set. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European, national and local goals are known throughout the institution.
What are the goals/objectives of your system/institution in relation to VET?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the goals/objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the goals/objectives
Are the European goals and objectives for VET included in the goals you have set?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action plan has been drawn up to achieve the European goals. Goals are communicated to the providers. Results on specific indicators are systematically collected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on few of the European goals in co-operation with VET providers from other Member States. Self-evaluation process takes place every second year. Departments make reports, supported by specific indicators, to management level
How is it assessed the degree to which these goals/objectives are fulfilled?		
Describe the procedure for the planning process within the quality approach in use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the procedure

Table 2: Planning: Quality criteria⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Table adapted from European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance, 29/09/2005

Implementation

Implementation is the phase that follows to ensure that planned actions achieve the set goals and objectives. Implementation needs to be coherent with the goals that have been set through regulations, funding incentives, provision of guidelines on how to proceed at local level, building capacity of key actors on quality issues through training, combination of internal quality systems at provider level with external inspections, etc. It is important for expectations to be transparent and that the procedural steps, including time-spans and tasks to be fulfilled, are clear for all the relevant actors involved. Developing ownership and personal motivation amongst staff, trainers and trainees, is essential to achieve coherence between goals, objectives and implementation. The table below illustrates key questions that will need to be addressed at both system and VET provider level.

Table 3. Implementation: Quality Criteria⁶⁵

Key Questions	Possible answers System level	Possible answers VET-provider level
How do you implement a planned action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad and narrow regulations, laws, rules National quality approach Demand for a quality approach at provider level. By funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on input Based on output. In cooperation with the Social Partners. In cooperation with the VET providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having a systematic quality approach and plan. Sharing this with the other actors. Involving local actors and adaptation to local needs. Investing in training of staff. Developing and communicating a staff policy based on the strategies and the planning of the VET provider's organisation/institution. Aligning tasks, authority and responsibilities.
Describe the key principles in the procedure of the implementation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving full responsibility for implementation to VET-providers. Setting up a number of minimum criteria the providers have to meet. Giving a specific quality approach to be used by all providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising and allocating funds to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance and resources Partnership Leadership Process management Training of trainers Didactical material. Demanding transparency and coherence with goals. Involving different stakeholders in the work. Ensuring good working conditions and facilities throughout the organisation.

Evaluation and Assessment

This aspect of the quality assurance model includes evaluation of the programme delivered by objectives including learner data as well as assessment in terms of achievement of outcomes at system and individual levels. Evaluation mechanisms need to be carried out according to the context, defining the frequency and scope, and providing evidence of the findings to those concerned, highlighting strengths, and areas for improvement and recommendations for action.

⁶⁵ Table adapted from European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance, 29/09/2005.

The assessment and evaluation phase usually involves the collection and processing of data followed by discussions on the results which have been achieved. It is important to collect relevant data. The effectiveness of the assessment process depends to a large extent on the methodology and frequency of data collection, and on the coherency between data collection and the pre-defined indicators on the one hand and the goals and objectives to be achieved on the other hand. The relevant stakeholders i.e. current and former trainees, staff, employers and trade union representatives should be involved in the discussions arising from evaluation results⁶⁶.

Table 4. Evaluation and Assessment Quality Criteria⁶⁷

Key Questions	Possible answers System level	Possible answers Provider level
<p>Describe your process for assessing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input • Processes • Output • Outcome results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Control systems - Inspectorates - Public access to the Web - Benchmarking (with other providers) - National standards on input, processes and output. • By assessing coherence between results and policy priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-evaluation - External inspection - Internal quality control The actual results compared to the expected results. • Results of teaching/training and learning. • Staff-oriented results. • Key performance results. • Societal results.
<p>How do you ensure that your assessment and evaluation is relevant and systematic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By systematic procedures for data collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of indicators - Measurements. • The system level and the Social Partners. • A Quality Institute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By asking the users. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of indicators - Measurements. • Managers, teachers, students, parents and employers.
<p>Which stakeholders participate in the assessment and evaluation process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of the relevant stakeholders in: initiatives, decisions, evaluation, certification, political support, legitimacy of political decisions. • On the occasion of VET reforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex ante, 'in itinere' and ex-post evaluations • Every third to fifth year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevant stakeholders participate in a broad range of activities e.g.: initiatives, decisions, evaluation, certification, the link to the labour market. • Ex ante, 'in itinere' and ex post evaluation of the training activity.
<p>What roles do the different stakeholders play?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system level and the Social Partners. • A Quality Institute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers, teachers, students, parents and employers.
<p>When do you monitor, assess and evaluate (frequency)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of the relevant stakeholders in: initiatives, decisions, evaluation, certification, political support, legitimacy of political decisions. • On the occasion of VET reforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex ante, 'in itinere' and ex-post evaluations • Every third to fifth year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevant stakeholders participate in a broad range of activities e.g.: initiatives, decisions, evaluation, certification, the link to the labour market. • Ex ante, 'in itinere' and ex post evaluation of the training activity.

⁶⁶ Education European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a ' Common Quality Assurance 29/09/2005.

⁶⁷ Table adapted from European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a ' Common Quality Assurance, 29/09/2005.

Review (feedback and procedures for change)

Quality assurance must also ensure constant review combining self-assessment with evaluation by an external body, process feed-back and changes made based on the feedback obtained. The phase of review is essential. However, it often ends up being the weakest link, leading to little revision of planning, fine-tuning of quality objectives and of quality management activities.

Transparency is essential in this process. It is important to make public the results of the quality assessment procedure and to foster an open debate with the relevant stakeholders on the factors which might have contributed to certain results.

Table 5: Review Quality criteria⁶⁸

Key Questions	Possible answers System level	Possible answers VET Provider level
How do you organise feedback and procedures for change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback procedures are defined by regulations and revised and changed through periodic reforms of the VET system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback and procedures for change are an integral part of the provider's own learning organisation.
How do you ensure systematic feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback follows a predefined plan. Feedback takes place on an ad hoc basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each department has to report to management in accordance with a fixed plan.
How do you make the feedback on quality in VET transparent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placing the data and the conclusions on the homepage. Arranging a number of seminars /conferences on quality in VET. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the information is accessible on the provider's homepage or on paper:
How do you ensure that the results of the assessment/ evaluation are being used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By the transparency of the process. By inspectors. By establishing complaints procedures. By sanctions and rewards/funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control and development meetings with departments in the institution. Participation of all the relevant stakeholders in the review work.
How do you relate goals/objectives to the assessment and evaluation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the occasion of the reforms. When the annual tenders are awarded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings at departmental and institution levels as a systematic part of the decision-making structure.

Methodology

The methodology adopted is an important transversal dimension of quality assurance and is present throughout the model. It includes methodologies used at each of the phases: in decisions about participation mechanisms, measurement and indicators; in the design of assessment and evaluation tools; developing procedures for planning, implementation and feedback; as well as finding ways of combining all elements in order to create a unified system.

⁶⁸ Adapted from European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance,

Table 6: Methodology Quality criteria⁶⁹

Key Questions	Possible answers System level	Possible answers provider level
In what way do you use a systematic quality assurance approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the normal procedures of the Ministry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choice of quality approach on the basis of a standard quality system e.g. ISO or EFQM.
What is the role of self-assessment in your Quality Assurance approach?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-assessment (SA) is applied at all levels within a co-ordinated framework. SA provides a systematic and general view of all the activities performed by VET-providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-assessment is organised in a systematic way to improve the performance of the organisation, highlighting priority areas. Self-assessment used as a basis for benchmarking.
Which stakeholders are involved in the different steps of your quality approach and in which roles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At national level, social partners play a major role together with political actors. Accreditation agencies play a major role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of different actors - from Social Partners to parents and students (clients) involved. External consultants participate in some parts of the activities.
Which tools and procedures do you use for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tools and procedures developed at system level e.g. questionnaires and scales for measurement. Indicators are used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of common questionnaires, instruments for measuring quality, benchmarking, etc. through collaboration with a selected group of other VET-providers.
How do you motivate the actors to play their role properly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political influence. Participation in the Advisory Board on VET. Close co-operation with the world of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The external actors influence the VET providers, e.g. as board members. Internally, personal development. Image/results of the institution.
What strategies assure the implementation of change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political decision-making process. Stakeholders' involvement. Market forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality system includes clear strategies for change.
In what way do you use external assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In case of problems and as a national assessment plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit following our plans.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a relevant method/tool to assess and evaluate quality, and to ensure and develop quality at system and provider levels. It may cover one, several or all of the factors that have an impact on the quality of the VET provision, including the organisation of the VET system/institution, mechanisms and resources, pedagogical expertise, as well as relations with external environments.

⁶⁹ Adapted from European Commission, Education and Culture, Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance, 29/09/2005.

There are two main modes of self-assessment. It can be applied either by national bodies to pilot and support quality in VET provision. In this case self-assessment primarily targets national VET goals and is implemented accordingly to country specific regulatory frameworks. In the second case, self-assessment is carried out by VET providers at institution level. The technical working group has devised sample self-assessment guidelines for both levels⁷⁰. The European guide for self-assessment is primarily addressed to VET providers and gives guidance on ways of performing self-assessment, with concrete quality criteria and explanatory statements. It also has a guide for performing self-assessment at system level and gives an overview of different existing frameworks for self-assessment.

Self-assessment helps VET providers to analyse their responses to these challenges, and to provide adequate feedback on areas needing change. At system level, self-assessment helps to improve good governance which is necessary to provide adequate statutory provisions, to allocate the necessary resources, to check results and provide feedback in due time, enabling VET providers to respond and carry out the necessary changes.

2.4 Key Elements of Quality Assurance for VET Qualifications

The importance of quality assurance was again highlighted in the Commission document⁷¹ introducing the European Qualifications Framework. In bringing together the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes, it is important that both higher and vocational education endorse and apply common principles of quality assurance. It is argued that this can be achieved through common European principles, which reflect a shared understanding of sound quality assurance approaches. These principles aim to help policy makers and practitioners get a better insight into how the existing QA models work, identify areas of improvement as well as take decisions based on common references⁷².

Building on the Common Quality Assurance Framework in VET and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education⁷³, a certain number of common principles on QA are identified and proposed at a European level as part of the European Qualifications Framework.

The Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training being proposed⁷⁴ highlight the need for quality assurance:

- necessary to ensure accountability and improvement of education and training;
- policies and procedures to cover all levels of education and training systems;
- to be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions;
- to include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies;
- where external monitoring bodies or agencies should themselves be subject to regular review; and
- which includes context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.

It is consequently highlighted that quality assurance systems should include:

- Clear and measurable objectives and standards;

⁷⁰ See 'A European Guide to Self-assessment', <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

⁷¹ Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, 5.9.2006
⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ just reviewed in the previous sections

⁷⁴ Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, 5.9.2006

- Guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
- Appropriate resources;
- Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
- Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement; and
- Widely accessible evaluation results.

Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis. This would lead to better understanding of how quality assurance can be applied in different contexts as countries learn from each other.

It is also important for quality assurance to promote a cooperative process across levels, involving all relevant stakeholders, within countries and across Europe. Particularly at European level, quality assurance guidelines can also provide reference points for evaluations and peer-learning⁷⁵.

2.5 Conclusion

There is agreement across all Europe for the need to have sound quality assurance systems within all education and training institutions, whatever the level or type of training provided. Although several common general principles for quality assurance have been identified at European level, the different contexts across countries, systems as well as levels need to be acknowledged. It is thus within this perspective that all VET institutions across Europe are encouraged to develop their own quality assurance systems that are relevant to their context but which will also provide some form of measurement for comparability, transparency and mutual trust with other VET institutions within a European knowledge society.

⁷⁵ Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, 5.9.2006

3.0 The proposed Framework for Quality Assurance of VET Qualifications in Malta

Quality assurance is crucial for ensuring that any qualifications, local or international, offered in Malta respect agreed and established standards. It is essential that any nationally agreed accreditation provided by the Malta Qualifications Council adheres to quality assurance standards if vocational qualifications are to carry currency in both the local and European labour market. Quality assurance standards and procedures need to be also easily used and understood within and outside training institutions, not only in Malta, but also across Europe, promoting comparability, transparency and mutual trust.

Quality assurance needs to be at the heart of the whole accreditation process. Volume II of this series provides a diagrammatic representation of the accreditation process (also given below). It mainly involves the role of industry, the Malta Qualifications Council, the training providers as well as the learners as the main key players. The processes involved include the setting of occupational standards, the accreditation of training institutions and the accreditation of courses which enables the planning, delivery of courses, assessment and evaluation of learners, leading to certification.

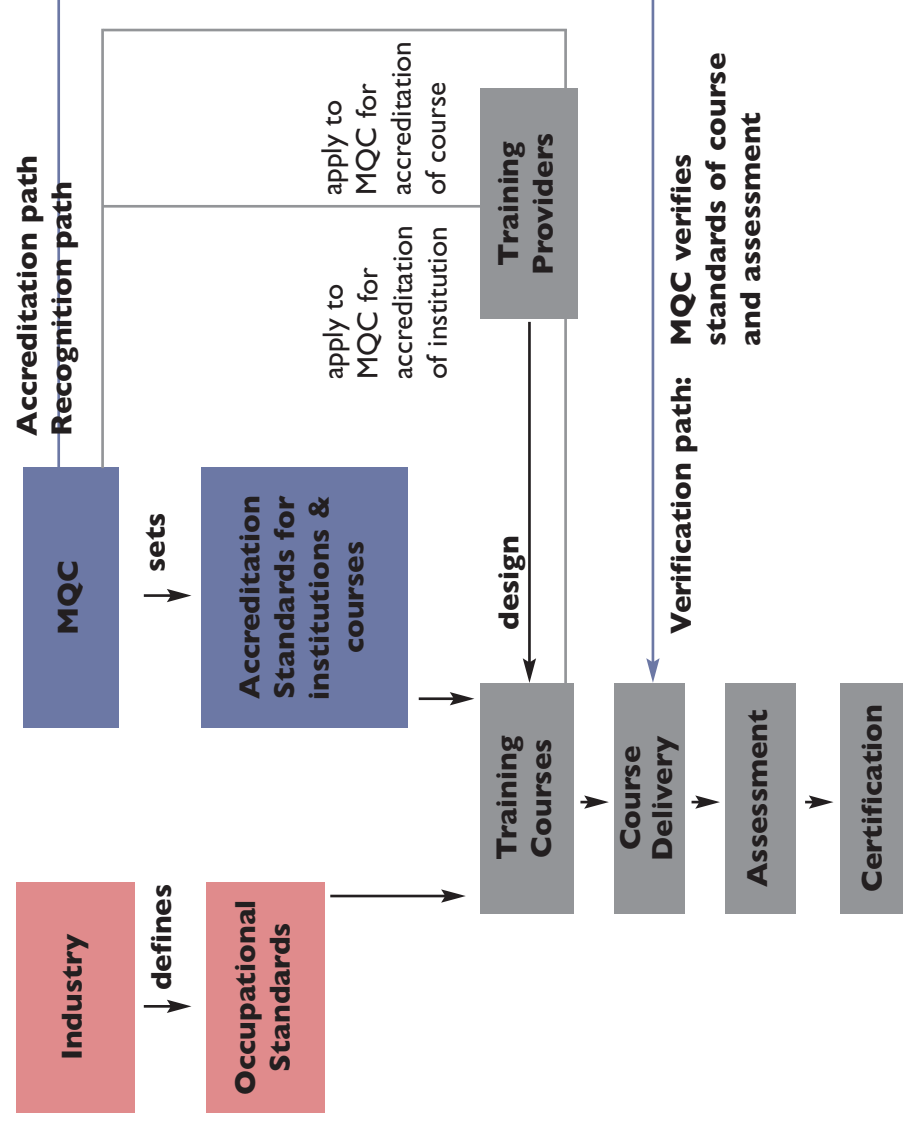


Fig. 3: Mapping the Accreditation Process

The key players in the accreditation process have different functions. Industry is the key driver in setting occupational standards on which vocational training courses need to be based. The Malta Qualifications Council has the role of setting the necessary quality assurance standards which institutions need to maintain in order to be considered accredited training institutions. The Malta Qualifications Council is also responsible for ensuring quality assurance standards in the planning, delivery, and assessment procedures of training courses leading to accredited certification.

The conceptual framework of the principles of quality assurance in the context of VET reflects the quality assurance standards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) Provider Quality Assurance – Policy. www.fetac.ie/qa/provider_quality_assurance_policy_PDF_file. In order to ensure quality assurance, the Malta Qualifications Council has to set the quality assurance standards and mechanisms which vocational training institutions need to have in order

to be included in MQC's register of accredited training institutions. Being an accredited institution does not automatically mean that all the courses offered by these training institutions are also accredited. It means that accredited training institutions are entitled to apply to the MQC for the accreditation of their training courses. In this second process, training institutions also have to show that they possess the required mechanisms of quality assurance for the specific training course as determined by the MQC.

Table 6: Requirements for Accredited Certification

Training Institution	Training* Course	Recognition Value
Not accredited by MQC	Not accredited by MQC	No Value
Accredited by MQC	Accredited by MQC	No Value
Accredited by MQC	Accredited by MQC	Is recognized locally and within Europe

*It is possible for a non-accredited institution to apply for the accreditation of a training course

Training institutions' first need to comply with the quality standards set for the accreditation of training institutions in order to be included in MQC's register of accredited training institutions. Following accreditation of their institution, training providers will then need to consider the occupational standards as well as the quality assurance standards for course development, delivery and assessment in order to apply for the accreditation of each and every course developed. Once the course design is approved by the Malta Qualifications Council, training providers can then offer and deliver the course to learners, provide assessment and issue certification.

Within this process, the MQC will be involved in a consultation/verification process, where, through the service of verifiers, experts in the particular vocational field, it will ensure that the standards it has set are being respected.

3.1 General Quality Assurance principles endorsed by the MQC

Based on the work on quality assurance in vocational education conducted by the Technical Working Group on Quality Assurance of the Commission, as well as the work done by the group working on Higher Education, as well as a review of quality assurance systems in specific countries, the Malta Qualifications Council has identified a number of general principles on which all quality assurance in vocational education in Malta needs to be based. These principles will represent the key features that the MQC will be identifying as indicators of appropriate quality assurance measures being applied by training institutions in running their institutions as well in delivering training courses.

These main quality assurance principles are the following:

- **Quality as the basis of training provision:** The Malta Qualifications Council is committed to promoting quality in the provision of vocational training in Malta. This means that it is committed to identifying, meeting and seeking to exceed the needs and expectations of learners and consequently also of prospective employers;
- **Improvement mechanisms:** Quality assurance is not there to 'fail' training institutions. The main role of quality assurance should be that of regular monitoring and evaluation of provision which is then fed back into the system in order to change and improve current training provided;

- **Transparency of process and results:** Quality assurance should be a transparent process. Processes and results, as well as resulting actions, should be made available to those involved within the institution as training providers, to the Malta Qualifications Council, to the learners themselves, as well as to other key players within industry such as employers, trade unions etc.;
- **Involvement of key players:** The Malta Qualifications Council values the participation and collaboration of all key stakeholders within the whole quality assurance process. Employers, trade union representatives, training providers, learners and also at periodic intervals, external experts, need to be involved in the quality assurance procedures within the planning, development, delivery, assessment and evaluation mechanisms as well as have input in integrating changes in the training provision as a consequence of the quality assurance process itself;
- **Contextuality of the quality assurance system:** The Malta Qualifications Council recognizes that different sectors and levels of training will require different quality assurance procedures. It is thus understood that each separate case may have different quality assurance mechanisms depending on the context of training provision being provided;
- **Training provider responsibility:** The Malta Qualifications Council holds training providers responsible for developing quality assurance systems within their institutions and for their training provision. It is important for training providers to provide for both internal and external methods of quality assurance in order to monitor their performance as training providers as well as evaluate and keep up to date the training courses that they provide;
- **Equality of access:** The Malta Qualifications Council endorses equality in quality assurance, promoting greater access to a diverse range of learners within an inclusive perspective of education provision;
- **Mutual trust:** Quality assurance mechanisms that genuinely promote learning and improvement should allow for collaboration and peer review with similar vocational education institutions on a national and international level.

These general principles are to be reflected in the different aspects of quality assurance in vocational education and training qualifications. This document will deal with the main quality assurance aspects which are related to the accreditation of training institutions as well as that of training courses. Volume II of this series has already highlighted the main issues that MQC will consider in the accreditation process of these two aspects. This document goes beyond what has been stated in Volume II and will discuss in detail and provide guidance with respect to the aspects of quality assurance that MQC will be expecting from training institutions and during training provision.

3.2 Quality assurance in accrediting Training Institutions

MQC has bound itself to develop a system for the accreditation of all institutions, state or private, those offering full-time or short duration vocational education and training in Malta. This system of accreditation can be achieved based on a number of standards that each training provider needs to fulfill. Quality assurance standards are the heart of such an accreditation process as they are the tools through which the quality of vocational education and training provision in Malta can be regulated.

The Malta Qualifications Council is to set the criteria against which training institutions may apply for recognition and accreditation. Each training institution would need to satisfy a set of criteria. These criteria, as listed in Volume II, will require that training institutions have mechanisms to ensure five main aspects already identified in Volume II of this series. At this point, each one will be considered and reference to quality assurance for each will be dealt with in order to provide details and information for training institutions intending to apply to MQC to become accredited vocational training institutions and included in the register of accredited institutions.

3.2.1 Acceptable physical amenities to provide training in adequate and safe conditions

Vocational training in most cases takes place either within training institutions, during work placements, or through the use of distance learning. In any case, training providers need to ensure the health and safety of their staff and learners at all times. There are therefore two main aspects that they need to ensure. The first refers to the type of physical amenities used when providing training. It is important that buildings used respect the minimum health and safety standards and regulations. The second aspect refers to ensuring the health and safety of staff and learners within the training premises as well as during work placements. **It is being proposed that MQC enters into an agreement with the Occupational Health and Safety Authority of Malta (OHSA) to ensure that inspections on the infrastructure of training institutions are conducted according to international health and safety standards and that training institutions are certified on all physical amenities for MQC by OHSA**

Physical Amenities used

In the case of provision of training spaces, training providers need to show how their premises follow the minimum health and safety standards as stated by law⁷⁶. Health and safety regulations specify the amount of space that needs to be allocated per person inside workplaces as well as other amenities that need to be present and catered for according to legal regulations and specifications. These are mainly specified in Legal Notice 44/2002.

SCHEDULE ONE
Minimum number of sanitary conveniences and washing stations which should be provided by an employer

The number of people at work shown in column 1 refers to the maximum number of workers likely to be in the workplace at any one time.

Column 1 Number of people at work	Column 2 Number of sanitary conveniences	Column 3 Number of washing stations
1 to 5	1	1
6 to 25	2	2
26 to 50	3	3
51 to 75	4	4
76 to 100	5	5

Provided that an additional water closet and an additional washing facility shall be provided for every twenty-five persons above one hundred.

Fig. 4 Schedule 1 as stated in L.N. 44/2002⁷⁷

The Malta Qualifications Council is not interested in taking a regulatory role to ensure that laws relating to workplace regulations are respected. However, it wants to ensure that training institutions have mechanisms and evidence that show that they are aware of such regulations and are respecting them. It must be understood that it is not acceptable for quality vocational training provision to take place in physical buildings which do not abide by standards and specifications as stipulated by law. The Malta Qualifications Council thus emphasizes that all training by accredited institutions must be carried out in building spaces according to such standards as stated by the Malta Health and Safety Authority.

SCHEDULE TWO
Minimum workplace dimensions

- The total volume of a room used for work purposes, except those rooms used only for short periods of time, when empty, and when divided by the number of people normally working in it should be at least eleven cubic metres. A room or part of a room which is more than 3.0 metres high shall be counted as 3.0 metres.
- The figure of 11 cubic metres per person shall be considered a minimum and shall be increased to take account of furniture, equipment, machinery or fittings present
- The figure of 11 cubic metres per person shall not apply to:
 - small structures where space is necessarily limited, as in retail sales kiosks, shelters for use by watchmen, security personnel and attendants, machine or plant control cabs, mobile broadcasting units and mobile clinics< and to
 - rooms already in use for work purposes before the date of publication of these regulations, provided that where the room undergoes any modifications or structural alterations, its dimensions should be made to conform with the requirements of these regulations.

Fig. 5 Schedule 2 of L.N. 44/2002⁷⁸

⁷⁶ L.N. 44/2002 – Workplace (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements) Regulations, 2002.

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ *ibid*

Health and Safety Standards inside buildings

It is essential for training institutions to show to the Malta Qualifications Council that they have in place mechanisms which ensure that they follow and keep updated with health and safety standards within their premises as well as in the case of work placements. Whereas the MQC will not be regulating these standards, as this is the role of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority⁷⁹, it will be interested to know details about what health and safety quality assurance mechanisms the training institution has put in place in order to ensure that it always adheres to these standards. It is stated by law⁸⁰ that it is the duty of an employer to ensure the health and safety of workers at all times. The Law also stipulates that employers should make appropriate arrangements for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of the preventive and protective measures, taking into consideration the nature of the activities and the size of the undertaking⁸¹. Employers are expected to provide the necessary organisation and means by which to ensure the requisite degree of occupational health and safety standards⁸².

The box below quotes article 10 of the same law which stipulates that such system should be in place at any workplace. Training providers also need to take into consideration regulations with respect to the provision of first aid⁸³.

Vocational training often also involves situations where learners are trained at the place of work. Since the types of activities which are work oriented such as laboratory work, work on machinery, as well as work on actual job placements are often included in training programmes, other regulations regarding the health and safety of the learners need to be taken into consideration. Depending on the type of training provision involved, training institutions need to convince the Malta Qualifications Council that they have mechanisms that ensure health and safety standards where learners are on work placements. These may include regulations relating to aspects such as noise exposure⁸⁴, vibrations⁸⁵, use of work equipment⁸⁶, work in confined spaces or with high explosives⁸⁷, exposure to chemical⁸⁸ and biological⁸⁹ agents, carcinogens and mutagens⁹⁰ etc.

79 <http://www.ohsa.org.mt/>

80 L.N. 36 of 2003, Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act (Cap. 424), General Provisions for Health and Safety at Work Places Regulations, 2003

81 *ibid.* articles 4 (1) and (2)

82 *ibid.* article 4 (3)

83 L.N. 11/2002 – Workplace (First Aid) Regulations

84 L.N. 158/2006 - Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for the Protection of Workers from Risks resulting from Exposure to Noise) Regulations, 2006

85 L.N. 371/2005 - Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for the Protection of Workers from Risks resulting from Exposure to Vibration) Regulations, 2005

86 L.N. 282/2004 - Work Equipment (Minimum Safety and Health Requirements) Regulations, 2004

87 L.N. 41/2004 - Work Place (Minimum Requirements for Work) (Confined Spaces and Spaces having Explosive Atmospheres) Regulations, 2004

88 L.N. 227/2003 - Protection of the Health and Safety of Workers from the Risks related to Chemical Agents at Work Regulations, 2003

89 L.N. 228/2003 - Protection of Workers from Risks related to Exposure to Biological Agents at Work Regulations, 2003.

90 L.N. 122/2003 - Regulations on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work, 2003

Article 10 (1)-(4) of LN36/2003

(1) It shall be the duty of every employer and of every self-employed person to carry out, or to ensure that is carried out, a suitable, sufficient and systematic assessment of all the occupational health and safety hazards which may be present at the place of work and the resultant risks involved concerning all aspects of the work activity. Such assessments shall consider the risks to the health and safety of workers and of self-employed persons to which they are exposed whilst at work, as well as the risks to the health and safety of other persons, including visitors to the place of work, which risks arise out of, or in connection with the work being carried out, or by the conduct of the undertaking.

Provided that when carrying out such assessments, an employer and a self-employed person shall also take into consideration changes to the work activities being carried out and to the workplace, and shall take appropriate action.

(2) Where five or more workers are employed, an employer shall keep in his possession written or retrievable electronic copies of such assessments, and shall ensure that they are updated regularly.

(3) An employer and a self-employed person shall decide on the protective measures appropriate to the nature of the work being carried out which are required to be taken following these assessments and, if necessary, the protective equipment to be used.

(4) The assessments referred to in this regulation shall be reviewed whenever there is any major change in working conditions, or whenever the employer or self-employed person have reason to suspect that they are no longer valid.

Fig. 6: Article 10. (1)-(4) of L.N. 36 of 2003, Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act (Cap. 424), General Provisions for Health and Safety at Work Places, Regulations, 2003

Training institutions need to understand that one aspect of provision of quality training involves ensuring the health and safety of all learners at any time during their training. It is with this concern in mind that the Malta Qualifications Council will look into how accredited training institutions ensure their learners' safety as stipulated by law.

3.2.2 An administrative structure that is efficient in the administration of the services provided;

Running and delivering courses present an administrative challenge to training institutions. The need to register students, reply to student enquiries, organize timetables, identify and inform tutors, carry out and process assessments, are examples of administrative duties that training institutions have to handle on a daily basis. In order to ensure that a quality service is provided, it is thus important for training providers to have an administrative structure which can cater for and handle these demands.

Training providers, depending on their size, can cater for such demands in different ways. The use of ICT and professional databases help. Some institutions utilize their websites as a main way of offering services to students at the institution. There exist systems where website serves as notice boards as well as a means of communicating with the administrative centre within the institution. In other cases, institutions can rely more on personnel on the premises with persons assigned with responsibilities of dealing with learners' administrative demands.

The Malta Qualifications Council is interested in ensuring that the administration of an institution, whatever system used, is client friendly, efficient as well as transparent in its procedures. It will thus require training institutions to provide details of how they ensure:

- **Effective communication with students, employers:** It is important for training institutions to have a good and efficient channel of communication with its clients. The training institution thus needs to have channels which provide important information such as course details, organization, methods of registration, settlement of payment, processing of results and certification that are efficient and that serve students within an acceptable period of time. Training institutions, particularly those which include periods of work placement as part of that training, need to have good means of communication with employers, both with those who offer work placements as well as prospective employers of students at the training institution;

- **Adequate administrative procedures:** Running training courses requires administrative work such as the registration of students, issuing of payment invoices, organization of timetables, keeping record of details and assessments of students, service for the issuing of certificates etc. Training institutions must develop effective and efficient administrative systems to cater for all learners prior, during and after their learning experiences. This implies flexibility on the part of administrators to ensure that learners are encouraged to remain in any learning experience for as long as possible;
- **Human capacity to deal with the administrative demand:** The greater the number of students and range of courses offered as well as the number of learning modes utilized, the bigger is the administrative demand. Training institutions must take into account the time needed to carry out these tasks and to have adequate and well trained personnel who can deal with the administrative tasks effectively;
- **System for securing data protection:** Training institutions often ask learners to provide personal details in order to be able to process their results and issue certification. This demands that they are aware and adhere to the legal obligations as stated by the Data Protection Act. It is thus important for training institutions to install systems which ensure utmost confidentiality of gathered information and easy access to those who may require and are authorized to use this information;
- **A quality assurance mechanism that evaluates the administrative structure of the institution:** It is important for training institutions to have inbuilt mechanisms which continually monitor and evaluate the administrative structure to ensure that it is efficient and effective. Such a quality assurance mechanism can involve a periodic review through the use of questionnaires to the staff and students. It can also involve regular meetings of the administrative staff with higher authorities within the institution to discuss administrative issues and methodologies. There can also be a form of external review by an external consultant or through the use of peer review and collaboration with similar institutions locally or abroad. Whatever the method of quality assurance the training institution adopts, the Malta Qualifications Council will ensure that the system being used is adequate enough to provide good administrative backup for the training institutions and in particular to teachers and learners.

It is clear that in no way is the Malta Qualifications Council placing any unreasonable and added administrative burden on training institutions in order to award providers with accreditation. It is difficult to identify one main administrative structure needed due to the range in size of institutions as well as the diversity of the training being provided in Malta. Nonetheless, whatever the size or type of training institution, the Malta Qualifications Council wants to ensure that any accredited training institution has an administrative structure which provides a quality service. It is up to training institutions to decide on how to go about setting their own quality assurance structure. As has been stated in the general principles, it is the providers' responsibility to set up these mechanisms and to MQC to ensure that these are adequate enough to provide quality training and education.

3.2.3 Capacity of trainers

Vocational training institutions are involved in the business of learning. It is thus essential that such institutions have a central pool of qualified personnel who have the capacity to deliver the training that the institution is offering. Training institutions, must therefore illustrate to the Malta Qualifications Council that they have:

- **the necessary capacity of trainers** who deliver the core of its training activities. These trainers do not necessarily need to be full-time employees of the institution, as this would place too great a demand on small enterprises. Instead, a commitment of contribution to the training courses offered by the institution would be enough. The training institution has to justify how the qualifications as well as the work experience of its trainers will ensure that training is being given by qualified and competent personnel that are in touch with actual practices within the labour market in that sector. Training institutions will thus be requested to provide information on the number and level of its trainers as well as, if applicable, on the criteria they use in choosing their trainers;

- **the capacity of affiliated employers in the case of training requiring work placements:** It is common for vocational training institutions to include work placements as part of the training. It is thus important for training providers to ensure that they have a pool of employers on which they can rely for providing work experience. Training institutions are thus to show the number, level and type of relationship with a number of employers. A letter of intent by employers to provide work placements if possible would allow training providers to show capacity to provide these work placements which students would need;
- **continual professional development of the training staff** so that the training provided reflects current work trends as trainers keep up to date with changes in demands and competences within the labour market. This is particularly important for vocational training since training should be based on occupational standards which change as developments occur in the labour market. The Malta Qualifications Council is aware of the diversity of training institutions that exist. Large institutions can have a separate department with the sole responsibility of promoting and ensuring the professional development of its staff. Such structure, however, would not be financially viable for smaller training institutions. It is to be understood that it is not necessary to have separate administrative structures with the responsibility of capacity building. The Malta Qualifications Council is more interested in ensuring that training institutions are aware of the need for continuous professional development of its trainers and that it has some system, central or otherwise, which ensures that trainers keep updating their knowledge, skills and competences.

3.2.4 Assessment systems which allow learners to have a fair and truthful judgement of their competences, together with a system of appeals which allows an individual the right of having a fair re-evaluation should there be a dispute on assessment;

If certification from accredited training institutions is to be recognised at national and at European level, then they need to have in place assessment systems which are fair, transparent and based on identifying learning outcomes. This requires that assessment systems:

- **Indicate to learners the criteria and learning outcomes** on which they are to be assessed. It is the learners' right to be informed beforehand of the criteria on which they will be assessed. Learners also have the right to be informed beforehand of the assessment mode that will be used during the course of studies. In the case of a combination of assessments, the weighting given to each assessment is to be indicated at the beginning of the course and cannot be changed during the course of studies;
- **Reflect competences identified in occupational standards.** It is important that assessment of outcomes is based on the occupational standards as developed by MQC with the involvement of employers and practitioners in the particular sector. It is thus essential that training institutions have means and methods to ensure that assessment is neither too easy nor too difficult. There are various ways of ensuring this, but mainly through the active involvement of key players in the sector. This can be in the form of experts in the field acting as external examiners or as moderators. Feedback from employers about the competences of students from the training institution can be another way. In any way, the more involved key players are from the labour market, the better is the way of ensuring that the relevant competences are being assessed;
- **Have an established recording process.** Training institutions need to decide on the way they process the record of achievement of learners. They can decide on a pass/fail, a grading or a mark system. They can decide to be involved in the simple identification of achievement of competences in which case a record of whether a competence has been achieved is necessary. In any case, the training institution needs to have a policy for assessment which specifies the methodology that it uses for its assessment procedures. Such policy needs to be public and accessible to learners as well as to employers who would want to know more about the training provision of their employees;

- **Have methods of ensuring a fair judgement.** It is often the case that learners may not agree with assessments provided by tutors. Training institutions need to have assessment procedures which ensure that as much as possible, students get a fair and unbiased judgement of their performance. This may take the form of using two examiners, or the use of external examiners for moderation. Emphasis may be given to the use development and use of detailed marking schemes where these apply;
- **Provide methods of providing feedback to students.** Assessment should always be accompanied by feedback. Learners have the right to know the reasons for the valuation of their performance however good or bad it may be. Feedback can be given orally or in a more formal way through the use of official feedback forms attached to work when presented for assessment, in the form of tutorials, or in any other form. What is important is that no learner receives any assessment without feedback. Training institutions must make sure that they have a system for the provision of feedback but it is up to them what is the most adequate way to go about it;
- **A method of review in case of dispute on assessment:** Training institutions need to have a system through which learners can appeal on any assessment of their performance. This system should be formal and part of the administrative structure of the institution. Such system should ensure that learners have the means to appeal on any judgement and to have at minimum a second unbiased opinion of their work. It is up to the training institution to decide what system to implement. It then has to convince the Malta Qualifications Council that it has a fair and transparent system of appeals for assessment.

3.2.5 A quality assurance system, internal and external, which provides continuous monitoring and evaluation, as well as mechanism for improving the training provision within the institution.

All training providers need to ensure the quality of their training courses. This means that they need to be involved in assuring quality in planning, developing, delivering courses, as well as for assessment. Training institutions need to have the administrative structure responsible for quality assurance of its courses. This can be done in various ways and it is up to the institutions to decide on how to go about it. Some examples include:

- **Establishing Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Units (PMEs):** Large training institutions may consider the option of having a separate unit with personnel specifically responsible for the quality assurance of the courses within the institution. This means that this unit will be responsible for developing quality assurance systems and helping out departments in carrying out the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their programmes, as well as in publishing, where applicable, the results achieved. Such a structure would apply to a large institution since it would allow the institution to have more or less the same standards of quality assurance across its courses. Although there may be differences in the type of training as well as learning modes and assessment, it is still essential to ensure standards in quality assurance. Such a Unit would thus have the responsibility of:
 - Ensuring that procedures have been respected at all stages of course development, delivery, as well as assessment;
 - Ensuring that each course has been developed and approved following procedures that they develop to ensure quality e.g. by consultation with employers, unions etc.;
 - Setting when and how internal quality assurance of courses are to be carried out;
 - Promote and ensure that training staff are involved in continuous professional development;
 - Developing methods and deciding on frequency of external quality assurance of courses;

- Making the results of internal and external quality assurance exercises public to staff, students and other interested key stakeholders.

Such structure would then act as a reference point to the trainers who would be involved in the quality assurance exercise. They will be responsible for implementing the methodologies, with adaptations depending on the type and sector of training, of the quality assurance procedures developed as standard within the institution;

- **Establishing clear policies for quality assurance within the institution.** The Malta Qualifications Council is aware that it will not be economically viable or administratively possible for all vocational training institutions to have a separate unit dedicated to ensuring proper quality assurance procedures. It is not the intention of the Malta Qualifications Council to burden such institutions with demands that may render them less competitive. Nonetheless, **it is of utmost importance for the MQC to ensure that all accredited training providers have an established quality assurance mechanism in place.** As an alternative to PMEs, institutions can develop policies determining the procedures for quality assurance, and which each programme coordinator will then be responsible to follow and implement. Course coordinators will thus facilitate the quality assurance (both internal and external) of the course they are responsible for and report directly to the senior management within the training institution. In such circumstances, vocational education and training institutions need to develop and possess policies which deal specifically with quality assurance, describing the methodology to be adopted for its courses as well as who is responsible to implement the quality assurance exercise and how frequent. It will then be up to the senior management to ensure that such policies are being followed.

At this point, no more detail will be given about the quality assurance procedures that the Malta Qualifications Council would like to see in place, as these will be dealt with in detail in discussing the quality assurance procedures that need to be included in the case of vocational courses leading to accredited vocational qualifications.

3.3 Methodology which MQC will adopt in accrediting Vocational Training Institutions

At the end of the consultation process on the documents – *Valuing All Learning* - the Malta Qualifications Council intends to start implementing the new system for vocational qualifications in Malta.

One of the first steps will involve the accreditation of training institutions.

The Malta Qualifications Council, based on the final document on quality assurance, will develop the methodology for the accreditation process. The MQC will develop forms which training institutions will need to use to provide information about their institutions with respect to the five aspects identified in Volume II of this series and just amplified in section 3.2 of this document.

Training institutions will be required to fill in the forms and to provide documentation and evidence, where necessary, about the physical amenities, administrative structure, trainers, assessment procedures as well as quality assurance procedures that are followed within their institution. Once training providers feel that they have satisfied all the criteria established by the Malta Qualifications Council, they will present the documentation to MQC for evaluation. The Malta Qualifications Council will go through the documentation, possibly also execute sight visits and speak to the personnel within the institution, and based on the overall evaluation give different possible judgements. These judgements may be:

- **Complete refusal** where the institution is asked to review again the criteria set by the Malta Qualifications Council and to take action as most of the criteria have not been satisfied. The Malta Qualifications Council may stipulate a period before which the application cannot be resubmitted. In resubmitting, the training institution will need to complete the whole application again. This will take place in extreme circumstances where the standard of the training institution is much lower than that expected by the MQC;

- **Resubmission:** In such cases, the evaluation process of the MQC would not be totally satisfied that all the standards have been met. However, it is only in some aspects that the training institution does not fulfil the required standards. In such cases, the evaluation outcome will indicate those areas that need improvement and what action needs to be taken, and invite the training institution to resubmit in order to obtain accreditation. The training institution will not be asked to go through the whole process again, but will only need to provide details of only those aspects that it was required to make changes to;
- **Approval:** In the case that the training institution satisfies all the standards required by the Malta Qualifications Council, a positive response will be given. This means that the training institution will be accepted and recognised as an accredited institution.

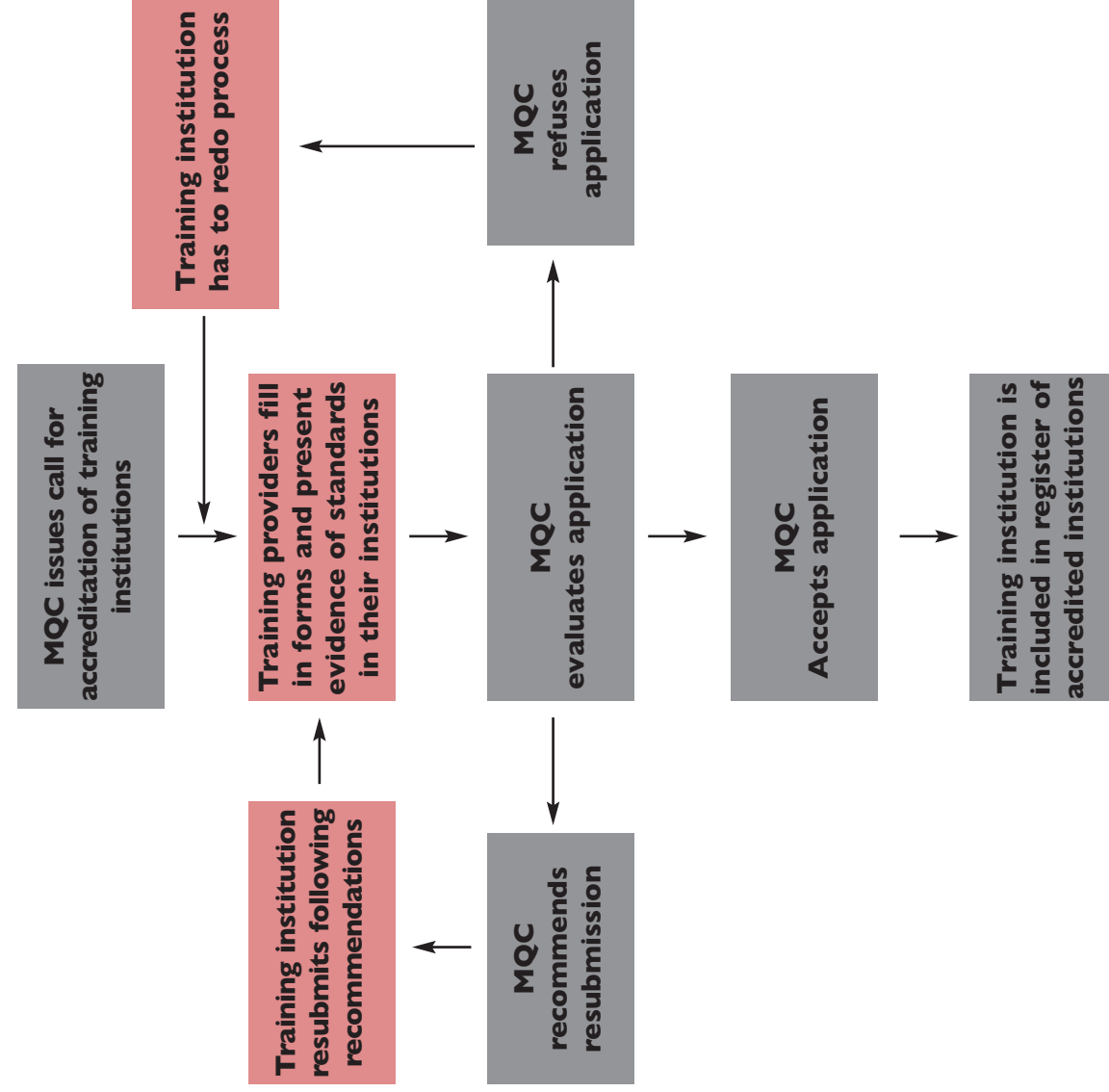


Fig. 7: Process of accrediting Training Institutions

Following the procedure, the Malta Qualifications Council will provide the accredited training institutions with the quality label **QVET MALTA** and include them in its **register of accredited training institutions** and on its website. The MQC will publish on its website both the names of the accredited training institutions as well as the sectors in which they can offer training.

3.4 Quality Assurance of Training Courses

Quality assurance is central in ensuring quality in the provision of vocational training. It is thus imperative for quality assurance to be inbuilt in every part of a course, from its inception to its delivery, assessment and provision of certification. The figure overleaf shows the course development path for traditional training courses, and how quality assurance needs to be present in all its stages: mainly in course development, course delivery, assessment of learners, as well as issuing of certification.

There are particular features of quality assurance that need to be present at each stage and these include:

- **A system of internal quality assurance:** Internal quality assurance refers to those mechanisms inbuilt within the institution which ensure that training provision respects the standards set by the training institution as well as the expectations of learners. Examples of internal quality assurance systems include mechanisms such as:
 - A step-wise vetting of course content in course descriptions by different key stakeholders (experts, colleagues, department board, union representatives, etc.) before applying for recognition of course to MQC;
 - Setting standards for qualifications and experience of trainers;
 - Evaluation procedures of training provided with learners, employers etc.;
 - Developing templates and procedures for the provision of course descriptions for learners prior to the commencement of the course;
 - Having a regular internal evaluation process of training courses provided through the use of questionnaires, interviews with past students, employers, unions, etc.
- **External quality assurance system based on the principle of reciprocity:** In order to ensure that standards of training provided by the training institution match those of other institutions, it is necessary to ensure that levels achieved compare with those provided by other institutions locally and nationally. Thus, external quality assurance needs to involve external and independent experts who provide feedback on the training provided. External evaluation can be in the form of regular external examiners and/or peer reviews with similar local or international vocational institutions.
- **Quality assurance with an aim to improve:** Quality assurance will only be of value if feedback of both internal and external evaluation is fed back into the system to promote changes in areas of weakness. If the last chain in the quality assurance cycle, that of updating and improving training courses, is not pursued, then the quality assurance mechanism would become useless. Training providers should therefore place emphasis on this last part of the quality assurance process.
- **Active involvement of key stakeholders:** Since vocational qualifications are driven by labour market needs, it is essential to include the participation of employers, occupational associations as well as unions in the quality assurance exercise. This can be achieved through asking for feedback on course descriptions, provision of work placements, standards of assessment, etc.
- **Need for transparency:** It is essential for training providers to ensure transparency within the whole quality assurance system. It is important that procedures and mechanisms within the institution, as well as the results of evaluations and review, as well as the resulting action taken, are made public such that anybody interested in the quality provided by the training institution will be able to understand how the institution goes about ensuring quality education and training.

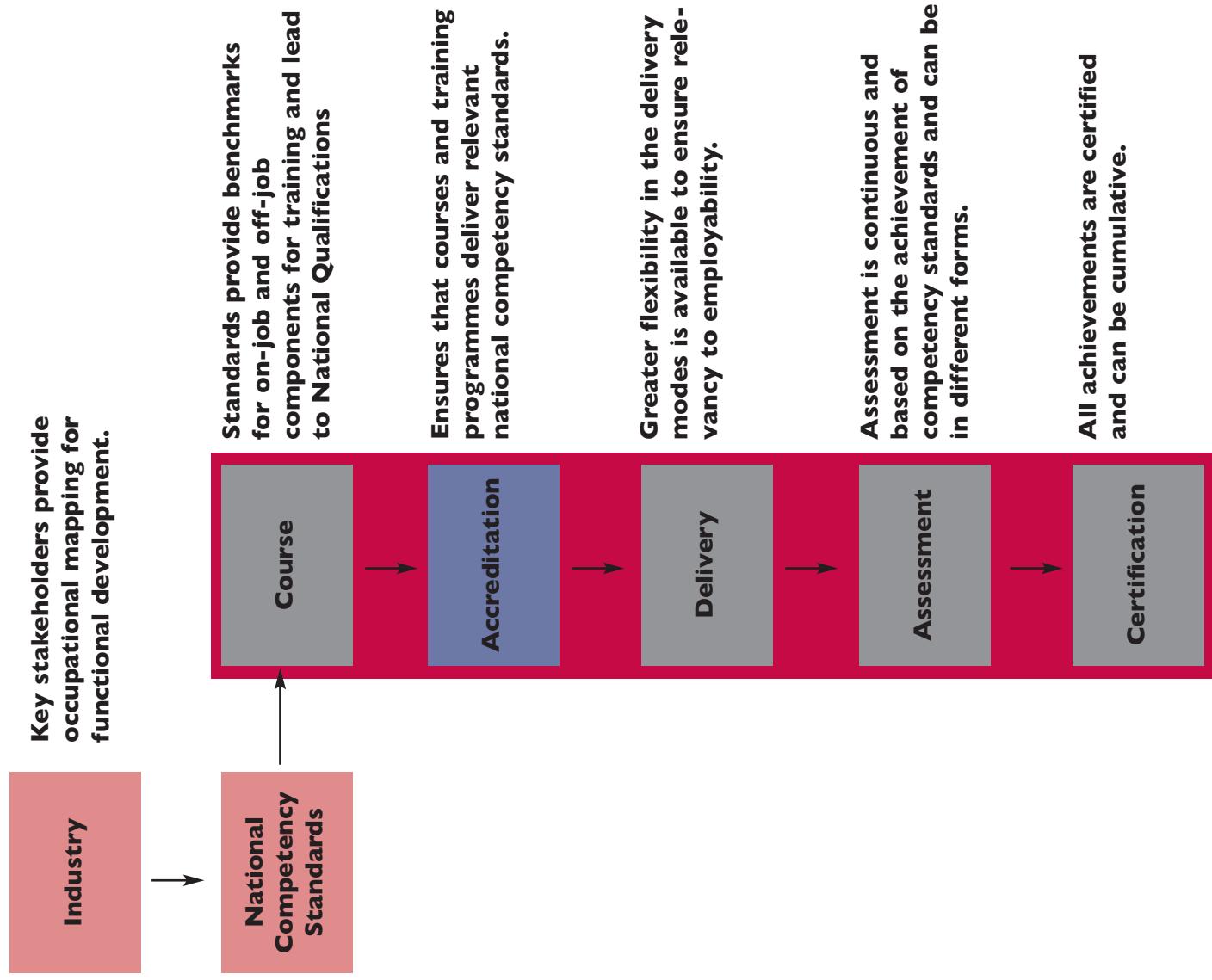


Fig. 8: Areas of Course delivery where quality assurance is essential

Internal quality assurance structures need to be such as to ensure quality at each stage of training provision. This section will take each phase and describe examples of desirable aspects of quality assurance that institutions should take into consideration when designing and setting up their quality assurance systems.

Course development

It is not enough to ensure quality in the provision of training by simply asking a few trainers to draw up a course structure and a course description. In order to ensure quality, training institutions need to set design templates with specific details which need to be included for each and every component of the course. Following the drawing up of the course content, there should

be in the place systems through which the course content can be examined and evaluated for the content included as well as the methodologies to be used, following which it is approved for presentation to the Malta Qualifications Council for approval.

In developing the course content, trainers need to:

- keep in mind and target the occupational standards within which the training is to be provided;
- ensure that the content fits within the specified standards, as well as try and find the best fit of credits which follow the guidelines set by the Malta Qualifications Council with respect to the balance between key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge;
- ensure through verification processes with key players, that the course reflects current trends in competences;
- ensure that the amount of MCVETs allocated to the training course reflect real learning needs;
- ensure that the level of competences included in the training course are equivalent to the level of the qualification on the National Qualifications Framework.

These aspects can be achieved in different ways. In the case of large vocational institutions, the institution can decide to develop its own system of course regulations and templates for course descriptions. Trainers then plan and develop training courses following MQC guidelines and possibly also in consultation with active practitioners within the labour market. The course regulations as well as the descriptions need to be approved by committees at departmental or institute level. Quality will be further ensured if one finds representatives of different key players on these committees. This vetting process will ensure that training courses do reflect as much as possible actual competency needs; that the trainers identified do possess the qualifications and experience to deliver effective training; and that the training institution has planned adequate assessment procedures. Through such process, the entry requirements of applicants wishing to follow the course also need to be identified and specified.

Smaller institutions do not need to possess such complex structures as this may create additional financial burdens. Nonetheless, they have the same obligations as larger institutions to ensure quality at the planning phase of their courses. It is still worthwhile for small training institutions to develop templates for the design of training courses in order to develop some form of standardization within the institution. However, rather than having a system of committees, training institutions can invite key players such as employers or their representatives, unions as well as other interested parties to provide feedback on their courses. Whatever system is used, it is essential that the methodology adopted is stated officially by the training institution by a policy document such that they can provide evidence to the Malta Qualifications Council as well as direction to their trainers of the mechanism used for course development.

Course delivery

It is essential for the training institutions to ensure that the training that they provide is effective and a good learning experience. Internal quality assurance systems must continually evaluate the level of training provision as well as the relevance of the training being provided. This can be done in different ways. **One common way is through the use of evaluation questionnaires duly filled in by students at the end of the course.** There can also be trainer collaboration through team teaching or evaluation. Added to this is the need to ensure the updating of textbooks and equipment used during training.

External evaluation and peer review can be effective ways of ensuring that training of a high quality is being provided as one can compare and contrast as well as learn from the ways and methods used by other similar national and international training institutions.

Whereas the methods mentioned above are to be continuous, it is important for training institutions to organize periodic internal course evaluations. This usually involves the process of setting up subcommittees with specific terms of reference to look at different aspects of the course being provided, to talk to the different stakeholders, from which they identify the strong and weak aspects of their training provision and consequently make recommendations to the management for areas and actions leading to improved delivery.

In the case of different and innovative learning modes, training institutions should have mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness in learning of new approaches introduced as ICT becomes more prominent in training provision. Such evaluations should be such that better methodologies are kept and enhanced whereas less effective ones eventually discarded and other methodologies sought.

The Malta Qualifications Council requires that training institutions endorse its requirement of regular internal and external mechanisms for evaluating provision and to develop systems which they find to be best adapted to their requirements.

Assessment

The main aspects of quality assurance with respect to assessment have already been dealt with in the section for training institutions. Nonetheless, when considering separate training courses, training providers also need to ensure that the assessment procedures are fair, up to the required standards as well as use a variety of methodologies. It is also essential that assessors have the necessary training to make impartial and professional judgements on learners' new competences. Training institutions thus need to put in place systems whereby to verify and compare assessments. Such methodologies include mechanisms such as multiple marking, consensus examiners' meetings, range of assessment modes etc. External examiners in key areas can also provide quality assurance, particularly in ensuring that standards are maintained and that the assessment being implemented really reflects the levels of competences required at that specific level.

It is also essential for the training institution to have adequate mechanisms for the storage and computation of learners' individual assessments during a course of studies. The methodology used in computing the total and final assessment should be communicated to the students prior to and following the course.

A comprehensive quality assurance system needs to be holistic and to include checking mechanisms that are continually evaluating processes and standards of course provision. Coupled with this there should also be periodic whole internal and external quality assurance exercises which further ensure standards with a wider range of stakeholders. It is through these mechanisms that vocational education and training can reach and sustain quality provision in Malta and within the European knowledge society.

3.5 Role of MQC in Course Quality Assurance

In the same way as training institutions need to apply and convince the Malta Qualifications Council that they are able to provide quality service, they have to apply to the MQC for the accreditation of each and every course offered by accredited training institutions. The process of accrediting courses will thus involve the following steps:

- **MQC issues guidelines and application forms to accompany course descriptions** The Malta Qualification, on finalizing the document series on Valuing Learning, will set the standards and details of the information that needs to be provided when training institutions apply to have their courses accredited. The main details about the credit content has already been outlined in Volume II of this series;
- **Training providers provide information on courses for accreditation:** Training providers present MQC with detailed course descriptions in terms of MCVET, learning outcomes, learning modes, as well as assessment. Training institutions also need to present information about the quality assurance mechanism used to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness and standards of the training course;

- **MQC verifies content and quality assurance methodology:** The MQC, through its verifiers who are experts in the sectoral field in which the course is present will evaluate the course details. Depending on the information submitted they will provide an answer to the training institution:
- **Refusal:** This occurs in cases where the curriculum content presented is far from the specification laid down by MQC and it is not possible to provide all the information through additional information. In such cases, MQC will provide feedback to the training institution and request that the organization comes back with a complete application form which should include all the information and standards requested;
- **Resubmission:** This occurs in circumstances where although not all the required information has been submitted, MQC feels that all requirements can be achieved through the submission of additional information. Training providers will thus be only asked to provide this additional information and the application is reviewed with a view of approving it;
- **Approval:** Approval is given when all the necessary information is supplied and the verifiers are convinced that the training course achieves the required standards. **The training course is issued with a quality label QVET MALTA Qualification.** MQC will also include the course on its website in the list of accredited courses leading to **QVET MALTA** qualifications. Accreditation of a course will be issued for a limited period of time after which the training institution will have to apply again for accreditation;
- **Advertising a course:** Following accreditation of the course, training institutions can advertise the course, recruit students and deliver the course. Following assessment, students will be awarded with the official accredited qualification;
- **MQC will monitor accredited courses:** The Malta Qualifications Council reserves the right to monitor those vocational courses that it accredits. It intends to do this through a system of verifiers. Verifiers are experts in the various sectoral skills within vocational education. They can be sent to training institutions to monitor the learning environment and experiences being provided, the standard of assessments that are carried out as well as other aspects. The roles of the verifiers will not only be that of assessment. They will also be able to provide training institutions with advice and support on how they can improve their service. The MQC will thus be in a position to regulate the provision of vocational education and ensure that the quality service promised is actually being delivered.

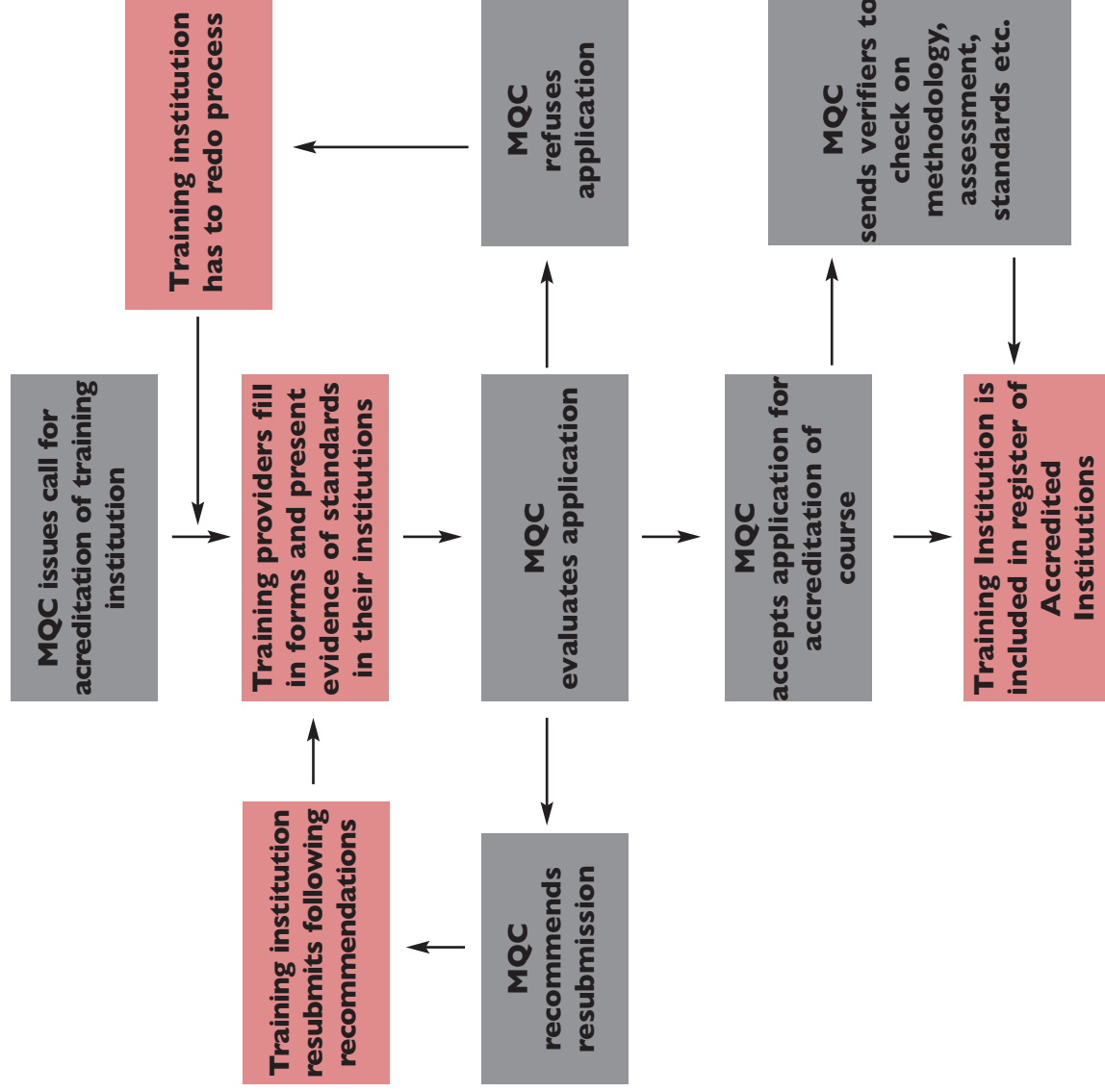


Fig. 9: Roadmap to accreditation of courses

Conclusion

This chapter has amplified and given examples of the aspects of quality assurance that the Malta Qualifications Council will be looking for in the processes of accrediting training institutions as well as vocational courses. Quality assurance is the tool through which Malta can enhance its economic sector as well as the European labour market. A Quality Assurance regime can provide the skilled workforce that is necessary for a knowledge based society.

4.0 Access to information

Access to information on issues related to quality assurance in VET is very important particularly to employers. It is necessary for training institutions to be transparent in the information that they provide about their courses to clients, authorities as well as other interested parties. Information should include various aspects ranging from basic information about courses offered to the quality assurance system which the institution uses to ensure the standards of its courses. **Transparency is essential to ensure that vocational education and training qualifications in Malta develop the prestige and value that they merit on a national and European level.**

4.1 A commitment to transparency

The Malta Qualifications Council wants to ensure transparency in the whole process of training provision, delivery and certification. This applies both to the vocational training providers as well as to the Malta Qualifications Council itself. Transparency is necessary to ensure that standards are being kept, leading to mutual trust at a national and international level as well as comparability between local qualifications as well as with those obtained within the European vocational training market. Transparency also facilitates employers' needs as they can easily have access to information on the training that potential or current employees have. It is also important for other civil society actors such as unions and workers/employers' associations who also need to build trust in vocational education and training that is being provided by local institutions. Transparency thus serves a number of purposes:

- **For ensuring standards:** Transparency is necessary as it provides access to information between training institutions as well as to other key stakeholders. This means that in providing information about the type, level, content and learning modes used, training providers can show how they are maintaining standards through their quality assurance procedures as well as other ways such as successful past students, employers' comments, peer review exercises, etc.;
- **For ensuring comparability:** Making accessible information about the training courses, their content, level, learning competences targeted etc. allows different training institutions, MQC, as well as other key players such as the learners themselves, employers, civil society groups and international institutions, to compare the quality of the training provided;
- **To promote mutual trust:** A transparent attitude to information about training provision is essential to promote mutual trust among the different key players. Missing data or information will naturally lead to suspicion with regards to the quality and standards as well as the procedures and service being offered. **Employers need to trust the quality of training being provided by institutions, learners need to trust the learning process for their advancement in the world of work, while unions need to trust institutions from where their workers are getting their training.** The Malta Qualifications Council also needs to build trust in the training institutions that it recognizes and accredits;
- **To promote the value of National Vocational Qualifications within the European Education Area:** The Malta Qualifications Council can only work to promote the value of National Vocational Qualifications within the European Qualifications Framework if training providers are transparent in their way of working. This allows them to be scrutinized also at international level where they can gain value and recognition alongside other vocational qualifications within the European Union.

4.2 Key players involved

Vocational training institutions should see that relevant information is accessible to all the key stakeholders. Different key players are also interested in different aspects of vocational education. The first thing which training institutions need to consider is who the key players are within this sector of development. These should include:

- **Learners:** Learners are the main clients of training institutions. It is thus important for learners to be able to access easily information about courses, level of qualification offered, courses regulations, fees, timetables, results etc. Training institutions thus have to develop ways of having quick and efficient communication methods with their students;
- **Employers:** It is important for employers to be familiar and build a relationship with training institutions. This serves two main purposes. Employers can develop a level of relationship with the training institutions which facilitates their participation in the development, evaluation and the placement of students for work experience in courses. Employers will also be interested to know more about the type and level of qualifications that exist as these will help them when recruiting new personnel as well as in planning the continuous professional development of their employees;
- **Civil society organizations:** Organizations such as student bodies, unions, employers associations as well as other sectoral organizations will be interested to know about the range, level, quality and other information of training provision available. It is thus important that these groups also have access to information as key stakeholders in the area of vocational education;
- **The Malta Qualifications Council:** The Malta Qualifications Council may wish to access information about the training institutions as well as the courses offered for various reasons. It may wish to disseminate information about the vocational qualifications on offer in Malta, or to verify specific details about the courses. The MQC also identifies the provision of information as one of the requirements that training institutions need to fulfill for inclusion in the register of the accredited institutions;
- **Other training institutions/training associations:** The Malta Qualifications Council promotes collaboration and communication among training providers on both a national and international level. Easy access to information about training institutions is one of the key ingredients in fostering such relationships. As different institutions learn about each other and how they work, the better and closer can collaboration and learning be. If training institutions seek membership in national and international networks, then it is important that they can provide information and details about member institutions;
- **Awarding bodies:** It is in the interest of awarding bodies to have a direct interest and an active role to play in the quality assurance mechanisms being used in courses which could lead to certification from the same awarding bodies. Quality assurance is part and parcel of teaching, assessment and certification;
- **Recognition Information Centres:** Similarly, recognition information centres have the task of updating their information on all quality assurance policies being used by the various training providers so that learners and those seeking information are given a clear indication of the standards being used in the provision of courses and the esteem within the labour market of such training courses;

4.3 Information to be made public

There is particular information that must be made public in training provision. Not all the methods and procedures however are of interest to the key players. Training providers must seek to be transparent in their provision through providing as much information as possible about their service while keeping the information simple and easily understandable by those who want to know more. In helping training providers strike a balance between these two aspects, key information that needs to be made public is the following:

- **Information about the training institution:** It is important for training institutions to provide information about the institution, its services and activities as well as basic things such as where its premises are located, the names of directors, administrative staff etc. The list below gives an indication of those aspects which need to be included. Institutions should include any other information which they consider essential. Institutions should provide information about:

- Name of institution and whether it is accredited by MQC;
- The location (campus);
- The areas of study in which training is offered;
- The experience in vocational training built over the years;
- An overview of the leadership team within the institution;
- An overview of the expertise of the teaching staff;
- The national and international affiliations of the institution;
- Any award or programmes (national and international) that it has achieved or is participating in;
- Contact details for those who wish to ask any further questions about the institution's activities; and
- Times at which the institution is open to the public.

- **Information about courses on offer:** Information about courses on offer needs to be easily accessible to anybody interested in the vocational training offered by the particular training institution. Below is a list of the different types of information that needs to be made public. Although the list is not exhaustive, it is intended to try and cover as many aspects as possible. Information to be made public should contain:

- Title of qualification, and whether it is accredited;
- Level and sector of training provided;
- Duration of course;
- Course content with detailed description of the different MCVETs offered;
- Course modes of learning including details about work placements where these apply;
- Course mode of assessment;
- Course entry requirements;
- Course regulations;
- Procedures for application, application forms etc.;
- Registration and course fees as well as other possible expenses that students may incur in applying for and following the specific courses.

- **Information about administrative procedures:** It is often the case that many students following courses within institutions are unaware of the administrative aspect of courses as well as procedures of assessment and final compilation of certificate. Learners within an institution need to know about such procedures as they may not be aware of their rights as well as obligations. Every institution has its own way of doing things and its own regulations which need to be respected. This can only be achieved if such measures and procedures are made public and are accessible for learners to know about. Such information may be:

- Information about stipulated dates for registration of courses, credits etc.;
- Method used for work placements where this applies;
- Information about assessment procedures;
- Institution's policies about attendance, discipline, work ethic, plagiarism etc.
- Course regulations;
- Methods of appeal, revision of assessment etc. in cases of disagreement;
- Policies with respect to gender equality, inclusion, health and safety etc.; and
- The key persons and contact numbers (email) to contact with respect to administrative aspects of the institutions as well as course coordination.

- **Information about quality assurance procedures:** Each institution needs to make public the policies and procedures that it uses to ensure the quality of its services and specifically of the training that it offers. In order to show standards achieved, training institutions need to make public the methodology that they use in order to tackle quality assur-

ance at institutional level as well as at course level. It is important to make public the administrative structure, the policies and procedures for quality assurance. These aspects should include details about the tools used, the different players involved in the process as well as at what points are internal and external quality assurance procedures applied;

- **Results of evaluation processes, resulting improvements:** Training institutions are to make public any outcome of internal and external quality assurance reports. Such reports should also be accompanied by any changes and improvements which resulted as an outcome of this exercise. It is only in being transparent about quality assurance procedures that training institutions will be in a position to show how they strive to keep excellent in the standards that they achieve.

4.4 Methods of communication

There are various ways in which training institutions can communicate and disseminate information about what they do and how they work. The main and easy, as well as relatively cheap way to do this is through the use of internet. A website can easily include all the information provided as well as present it in an organized way which would help the person to find information according to their needs. Internet is also widely accessible and will be able to reach a wide variety of audiences ranging from potential learners, to employers, unions etc. both nationally and internationally.

However, the internet should not be considered as the only means of communication as this will exclude that part of society which does not have access to internet and thus promote exclusion. Other ways of providing information may include other forms of media such as leaflets with information, publication of prospectus, adverts and articles in local newspapers etc. **MQC strongly recommends that every training institution should have its prospectus of full-time courses, qualifications framework and quality assurance policy provided to learners at least ten months prior to the commencement of the training course. For short courses such information should be provided at least five months prior to the start of the training course.** This is necessary to ensure that such information reaches its beneficiaries in a structured and constructive way, giving career counsellors and guidance teachers enough time to inform learners and to ask questions themselves about the training courses.

Training institutions also need to be able to reach as wide a variety of audiences as possible. They can distribute information leaflets in schools, local councils, union head offices etc. They can provide information through the use of television programmes or adverts. In the case of information to learners who are following courses, it is important to provide information packs with the relevant aspects of the course or promote the use of the internet (also providing some form of access). What is important is to ensure that information is easily accessible to those who wish to know more about the training institutions and the services that they offer.

4.5 MQC's commitment to communication

In its attempt to promote transparency as well as to try and reach as many potential learners as possible, the Malta Qualifications Council is committed to help in promoting transparency, particularly in its commitment towards lifelong learners. The Malta Qualifications Council is committing itself to include on its website as much information as possible on accredited courses available in Malta. It will also use its website to make public the list of accredited training institutions in its official register as well as create links to these institutions' websites. It will also provide the lists of accredited courses offered by sector and level such that anybody interested in finding a course of studies related to his/her needs or interests will be able to find out what is available. Employers can also easily check if particular courses exist and may choose to invest in the professional development of their employees through sponsoring their further studies. **Information on the MQC'S website will be continuously updated as more and more training institutions and courses will be accredited. It will also remove those courses whose accreditation has expired.**

The Malta Qualifications Council will also work towards promoting better quality assurance within vocational institutions. It will disseminate examples of good practice as well as provide links to relevant documents for the interest of training institutions. It will also promote further collaboration and act as a catalyst to promote mutual learning in the area of quality assurance.

The Malta Qualifications Council is committed to support and regulate vocational education provision such that it puts Malta's vocational qualifications on the same level as other qualifications across Europe.

4.6 Conclusion

Quality assurance is the key to giving Vocational Qualifications in Malta the standing and academic respect that they deserve on a national and European level. Quality assurance is also the tool to achieve parity of esteem between vocational and academic higher qualifications. Investing in quality assurance structures, training institutions will be investing in their service, their learners, as well as providing the country with the skilled labour force that Malta needs to be competitive within a European and global economy.

The Malta Qualifications Council is the national representative on the European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET). MQC is therefore fully committed to ensure that vocational education and training are quality assured on international standards by fostering the need to build the necessary capacity within our training institutions and by engaging international quality assurance agencies on the principle of reciprocity and systems of peer review.

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Annex II:

Glossary of Select Terminology Associated with Qualifications Frameworks

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications means that training programmes or parts [units] of programmes are interchangeable or can replace each other and that validated learning outcomes can exempt a person of whole or part of a training programme. Accumulation and transfer of qualifications require that learning outcomes acquired in different contexts and at different times are compared as regards equivalence and relative value.

Accreditation (of programmes, institutions)

The process of accrediting an institution of education and training, a programme of study, or a service, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative and professional authorities by having met predetermined standards.

Assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills and competences) of an individual, and typically leads to certification.

Awarding body

A body issuing qualifications (certificates or diplomas) formally recognizing the achievements of an individual, following a standard assessment procedure.

Basic skills (key competences)

The skills and competences needed to function in contemporary society, e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital competence and mathematics, among others.

Bologna Process

The Bologna Process initiated by the Bologna Declaration of European Ministers of Education on 19th June 1999 is a commitment by all EU Member States to harmonize the architecture of the European higher education system by improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability.

Certificate/Diploma

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following the successful completion of a training programme or a course of studies.

Certification (of knowledge, skills and competences)

The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.

Competence

‘Competence is the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and other abilities to perform a function against a given standard in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development. In the EQF, ‘competence’ is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Comparability of qualifications

The extent to which it is possible to establish equivalence between the level and content of formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas) at sectoral, regional, national or international levels.

Continuing education and training

Education or training after initial education or 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.*

Copenhagen Declaration

The Copenhagen Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission convened in Copenhagen on the 29th and 30th of June 2002 is a declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

Credits

Credits are awarding tools [such as A, B or C etc...] for the successful completion of a task. Credits are one of the tools designed to facilitate the implementation of credit transfer systems at national and European level. They are used by authorities, vocational and training providers, competent bodies and learners to support arrangements for accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes towards a qualification and for transnational mobility. Credits [credit points] are allocated to the qualifications and to the units of which a qualification is made up.

Curriculum

A set of actions followed when setting up a training course: it includes defining training goals, content, methods (including assessment) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers.

EQF

EQF stands for the European Qualifications Framework which is a meta-framework to support translation and communication between national qualifications systems and frameworks.

Formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organized and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Initial education/training

General or vocational education carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life.

Knowledge

'Knowledge' is the outcome of the collection and assimilation of information through learning. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.

Learning

'Learning' is a process by which individuals acquire and assimilate information, ideas and values as well as practical and cognitive skills and other personal and social competences. They learn through personal reflection and reconstruction and through social interaction. This process takes place in formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Learning outcomes

'Learning outcomes' are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

Level descriptors

Level descriptors express the level of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to higher or lower levels of achievement by the individual.

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

National Qualifications Framework

A National Qualifications Framework is a common reference point to all nationally recognized qualifications indicating level of education and training and progression from one level to another.

National Qualifications System

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalizing national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent.

Meta-framework

A 'meta-framework' like the EQF is a classification instrument for levels of qualifications designed to act as a translation device between different national and sectoral qualifications systems. For this purpose, the criteria for levels in a meta-framework are written in a highly generalized form and the EQF does not take over any of the established roles of national systems.

Mutual trust

Mutual trust is a term used in the context of qualifications to indicate quality assurance support measures and accountability in the awarding of certificates, diplomas and degrees.

Non-formal learning

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.

Programme (of education and training)

An inventory of activities, learning content and/or methods implemented to achieve education or training objectives (acquiring knowledge, skills or competences), organized in a logical sequence over a specified period of time.

Quality assurance

A transparent and clearly defined process to assure that quality education and training and quality deliverables will be built in institutions, training programmes and programmes of studies before the work is done.

Qualification

A 'qualification' is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. A qualification is a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process.

Qualifications Framework

A qualifications framework provides a system of coordination and for comparing qualifications by relating qualifications to each other, for promoting the quality of education and training provision, for establishing standards of knowledge, skills and wider competences and for introducing and maintaining procedures for access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning. The scope of a framework may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways in a country or may be confined to a particular sector.

Recognition

Formal recognition is the process of granting official status to skills and competences either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained skills and/or competences. Social recognition is the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders such as employers or national or international institutions.

Regulated profession

Professional activity or group of professional activities access to which, and the practice of which (or to one of its forms), is directly or indirectly subject to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions concerning the possession of specific professional qualifications.

Sector

A 'sector' is a range of professional activities on the basis of their main economic activity, product, service or technology (e.g. chemicals) or as a transversal professional category (e.g. marketing).

Sectoral qualifications system

A 'sectoral qualifications system' is concerned with the qualifications process confined to a specified sector and may exist at national and international level.

Sectoral qualifications framework

A 'sectoral qualifications framework' is defined as the structures and processes established by a sector for the development and implementation of qualifications, including institutional arrangements, quality assurance, assessment and awarding procedures, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market.

Skills

'Skills' are the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Translation device

In the context of qualifications, the term is used to denote the language or methods of verifying the equivalence between one qualification and another. An NQF for example is a translation device to verify whether one qualification carries the same weight of another in terms of content, level of education and training and assessment.

Transparency of qualifications

The degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour and training markets.

Validation (of non-formal and informal learning)

The process of assessing and recognizing a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

Valuing learning

The process of recognizing participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

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