



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Education and Culture



IMPROVING QUALITY IN THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR

BRUSSELS, 30TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2010

SUMMARY REPORT TO PARTICIPANTS

FINAL VERSION



CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Aim and objectives of the Workshop.....	1
1.2 Structure of the Workshop	1
1.3 Purpose of the summary report	2
2 KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE WORKSHOP	2
2.1 Quality and Adult Learning in Europe: Issues and Challenges.....	2
2.2 Session 1: Adult Learning, VET and Higher Education	3
2.3 Plenary Panel: Adult learning, VET and higher education: do we need a common approach to quality?	3
2.4 Session 2: Professionals and professionalism.....	5
2.4.1 A set of key competences for adult learning professionals.....	5
2.4.2 GINCO: Grundtvig International Network of Course Organisers	6
2.4.3 Approaches to the quality assurance of adult learning in Austria	6
2.5 Parallel Round Tables on Sessions 1 and 2.....	6
2.6 Session 3: Systemic Approaches to Quality Assurance	7
2.6.1 Certificate for quality for further education in Switzerland	7
2.6.2 Quality Standards and Accreditation for Adult Learning in Romania.....	8
2.7 Session 4: Quality in Lifelong Learning: Lessons from LLP Projects	9
2.7.1 QALLL - Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning with a focus on VET and Adult Education	9
2.7.2 Quality in the new scenario for adults learning: the QUALC project.....	9
2.8 Parallel Round Tables on Sessions 3 and 4	10
2.9 Reflection Note: Monitoring quality in the adult learning sector: as a learning process	10
2.10 Plenary Panel on overall recommendations from the Workshop.....	11
3 RECOMMENDATIONS	11
3.1 Structures	12
3.2 Stakeholders	12
3.3 Indicators.....	12
3.4 Role of the European Commission	13
ANNEX 1	15
ANNEX 2	19
ANNEX 3	20
ANNEX 4	22
ANNEX 5	23

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is a summary report on the Workshop on *Improving Quality in the Adult Learning Sector* which took place in Brussels on 30 June and 1 July 2010. The event was organised by the European Commission (DG EAC) as part of the 2010 'roadmap' of the Adult Learning Working Group for the implementation of the Action Plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn* (2007). The Action Plan's Priority Action 2: *To improve the quality provision* provided the backdrop to the Workshop.

The Workshop was attended by 33 participants from 20 countries including: Austria (AT); Belgium (BE); Croatia (HR); Czech Republic (CZ); Denmark (DK); Germany (DE); Greece (EL); Hungary (HU); Ireland (IE); Liechtenstein (LI); Malta (MT); The Netherlands (NL); Norway (NO); Poland (PL); Romania (RO); Spain (ES); Sweden (SE); Switzerland (CH); Turkey (TY); United Kingdom (UK/NI). European Commission staff was also in attendance.

1.1 Aim and objectives of the Workshop

The overall aim of the Workshop was to bring together stakeholders from a wide range of countries to share experience, to engage in discussion and to achieve mutual learning on policies and practices in relation to quality. The objectives were to:

- explore developments to date in relation to quality in general and to quality in adult learning in particular in the Member States and at European level
- contribute to work already underway in relation to quality in the Member States and at European level
- explore the extent to which developments on quality in VET and higher education could contribute to the debate on quality in adult learning
- make recommendations on how issue of quality in adult learning might be taken forward in the post-2010 period.

1.2 Structure of the Workshop

The Workshop took place over two days and comprised four types of activities as follows:

1. formal presentations followed by participant discussion on:
 - Introduction from the European Commission
 - Quality and Adult Learning in Europe: Issues and Challenges – presentation of the Background Report on Quality
 - Session 1: Adult Learning, VET and Higher Education
 - Session 2: Professionals and Professionalism
 - Session 3: Systemic Approaches to Quality Assurance
 - Session 4: Quality in Lifelong Learning: Lessons from LLP Projects
2. two rounds of three parallel Round Tables on the formal presentations in Sessions 1 – 4
3. presentation of recommendations from the Round Tables
4. a Plenary Panel on each of the topics:
 - Adult Learning, VET and Higher Education: Do we need a common approach to quality?

- Overall recommendations from the Workshop

1.3 Purpose of the summary report

The aim of this summary report is to present the key issues raised and the discussions that took place during the Workshop in order to support wider national and European discussions on the subject of quality in adult learning.

It is intended that the report will provide a record of the Workshop for participants and stakeholders in general. It is also intended that it will support the work of the European Commission and the Adult Learning Working Group in relation to the implementation of the Action Plan *It is always a good time to learn* and support developments on adult learning in the post-2010 period.

2 KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE WORKSHOP

2.1 Quality and Adult Learning in Europe: Issues and Challenges

The presentation of the Background Report on Quality focused on:

- the key influences driving the growing emphasis on quality in education and training throughout Europe;
- the four core dimensions and the three practical components of quality in adult education and training;
- European-level developments in quality in education and training since 2000 with particular reference to: VET; guidance; European tools and mechanisms; higher education; the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013; adult learning; and *ET2020*;
- quality in adult learning at Member State level as reported at the Regional Meetings on the Action Plan on adult learning, October-November 2009.

Major differences in approaches to quality assurance are in evidence in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) at EU and national levels. While respecting the principle of subsidiarity, quality assurance in VET targets system and provider levels with a tool-box of quality criteria and indicators. In HE the emphasis is on internal and external review and the quality control of the external review agencies themselves, standards are specified and guidelines are provided as to how standards may be achieved. In terms of political endorsement, EQARF, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, was approved by the European Parliament and the Council (2009) while the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs) in HE were adopted by Education Ministers in 2005. In both VET and HE, however, the development of quality assurance approaches is the outcome of more than a decade (1998 – 2010) of extensive discussions and mutual learning among all the stakeholders at EU and national levels with the intention of creating widespread mutual trust and agreement.

Discussion

The ensuing discussion focused on:

- definitions of quality and the need for adult learning stakeholders to agree a definition of quality as a first step.;
- the need to consider adult learning in all its diversity and forms, including distance and e-learning;
- the usefulness of considering adult learning as a service and the possibility of learning from developments regarding quality assurance of services.

2.2 Session 1: Adult Learning, VET and Higher Education

The key presentation in Session 1 described the quality process in VET since 2002 when the Copenhagen declaration¹ called for enhanced cooperation in VET to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET. As an outcome of subsequent co-operation between the Commission, the Member States, the social partners, the EEA-EFTA and candidate countries a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) was developed, and it was endorsed by the Council in 2004. The issue of quality was given a boost in 2005 by the formal establishment of the European Network on Quality in VET (ENQA-VET) which provided a European platform to facilitate exchange of experiences, common learning, consensus building and mutual support.

The adoption by the European Parliament and Council in June 2009 of the Recommendation on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF)² marked the start of a new phase in quality in VET. The objective of EQARF is to improve quality in VET by fostering transparency, common trust and recognition of competences and qualifications. The Framework does not prescribe a particular quality assurance approach, but, rather, provides common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators which are to be regarded as a 'toolbox', from which the various users may choose those 'they consider most relevant to the requirements of their particular quality assurance system'. EQARF is structured around a classic four-phase cycle of four repetitive steps for continuous quality improvement. For each phase (planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment, adaptation), quality criteria and indicative descriptors at system level and at provider level are set out.

All the stakeholders have roles to play in the implementation of EQARF. The Member States are invited to design an approach to best use EQARF and improve quality assurance systems involving the relevant stakeholders; establish a Quality Assurance National Reference Point (QANRP); participate actively in the EQARF network; and, every four years, undertake a review and report on the implementation process. In 2011 the design of their approach to quality assurance using EQARF will be completed in the Member States and in 2013 the first progress report and evaluation of the EQARF Recommendation will be produced. The role of the European Commission is to: promote and participate in the European Network; facilitate co-operation and mutual learning; undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the Recommendation; and, every four years, present a report to the European Parliament and the Council. Since January 2010, the network EQAVET is the overall vehicle for the quality process in VET.

Discussion

Attention was drawn to the fact that the presentation on the quality process in VET provided an important backdrop for the discussions on quality in the remainder of the Workshop. The point was made that the application of EQARF under EQAVET is at an early stage and that one of its key roles is to raise questions and focus discussion for European and Member State VET stakeholders rather than to provide ready-made answers.

2.3 Plenary Panel: Adult learning, VET and higher education: do we need a common approach to quality?

The plenary panel addressed the question: Adult learning, VET and higher education: do we need a common approach to quality? Magda Trantallidi, Ministry of Education, Greece and a member of the Adult Learning Working Group made the point that compared to VET and HE which have a vertical structure and are more visible, adult learning is complex and diverse and has a horizontal structure with a wide range of provision and types of learning.

¹ http://ec.europa/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf, OJ C 13, 18.1.2003, p.2.

² OJ C155, 8.7.2009

Therefore, at this stage a process for the quality assurance of all adult learning distinct from those of VET and HE will give more impetus at European level. Furthermore, because of divergences in structures, content, processes and outcomes, an integrated approach to quality *within* adult learning, namely between vocational and non-vocational adult learning, does not seem realistic at this stage of policy development.

Ms Trantallidi based her call for distinct quality processes for adult learning on the findings of the ESNAL (Quality Assurance and Development in European Continuing Education) project (2000) that adult education needs a combination of self-evaluation/summative assessment and external evaluation/inspection to ensure learners benefit fully from provision. In particular, as far as low-skilled adults are concerned, empirical evidence from ESNAL suggests that quality assurance does not necessarily address the needs of the individual learner. Moreover, self-evaluation as part of quality assurance is core to professional self-perception.

Sue Waddington of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) which represents the voice of European adult education NGOs on the Adult Learning Working Group and some of the related Focus Groups, drew attention to the diversity of adult education providers and systems and suggested that while the example provided by the development of European quality assurance models for VET and HE could inform and inspire the development of models for adult education, they could not be simply transferred to the adult education sector which is very different from more formal education sectors. Adult education organisations will need convincing of the need for a European quality assurance model (in addition to existing national or local quality management systems).

Sarah Colmar, an independent training and development consultant in the UK, was of the opinion that a common approach to quality is needed, but its application should be moderated according to the form of adult learning and its outcome. Every encounter with adult learning must be positive for the adult student so as to encourage a lifelong approach to learning and development. There is scope also for the quality assurance of continuing professional development within organisations/businesses.

Christian Tauch of DG Education and Culture, European Commission, made the point that adult learning could take inspiration from the ESGs (European Standards and Guidelines) and the culture of internal quality assurance and external certification of minimum threshold criteria in HE.

The recommendations from the first Plenary Panel are presented under **3. Recommendations**.

Discussion

Issues raised by the Workshop participants following the contributions of the members of the plenary panel related to:

- the patchiness of quality assurance measures in adult learning in the Member States, including in publicly-funded adult learning;
- the need to identify approaches to quality assurance at Member State level which contribute to the creation of trust among stakeholders;
- the need to ensure that quality assurance of adult learning benefits adult learners;
- the challenges to quality assurance in adult learning, including cost and the lack of a national infrastructure for collecting good adult learning data in many Member States;
- the feasibility or otherwise of a common approach to quality assurance which is capable of accommodating the specific visions and goals of both formal and non-formal adult learning;

- the need to avoid overburdening small community-based providers of adult learning with heavy quality assurance approaches;
- the contribution of quality assurance to making adult learning and its outcomes visible;
- the role of quality assurance in fostering mutual trust between adult learning and other sectors such as VET and HE to enable flexible pathways between sectors and the mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications;
- the need for good evidence of the benefits of adult learning, especially in the current economic climate.

2.4 Session 2: Professionals and professionalism

Three presentations addressed the issue of professionals, professionalism and quality in adult learning.

2.4.1 A set of key competences for adult learning professionals

The 2008 ALPINE study³ identified an agenda for improving the quality of staff working in non-vocational adult learning (NVAL), including the development of competence profiles and qualifications structures; in-service training; and external and internal evaluation of the sector. The presentation *A set of key competences for adult learning professionals: strategies for improving the quality of adult learning staff* presented the results of a follow-on study launched by the European Commission under the Action Plan's Priority Action 2: *To improve the quality provision*. Priority Action 2 considers the quality of management, teaching and other staff to be the key determinant of the quality of adult learning. The Competence Profile is an overarching profile of competences with layers of contexts that embrace adult learning in all its forms and all its settings.

Since roles in the sector are extremely diverse, the competences are based on six key activities – teaching; management; guidance and counselling; programme planning; media; administrative support – rather than being located in specific roles, jobs and individuals. Context is important as it will influence the social and other competences needed by the ALP.

At the end of the presentation on the competence profile reference was made to an evaluation carried out on 63 local adult learning centres and learning partnerships⁴ in relation to how they serve adult learners. The evaluation found that the determinants of a rich and powerful learning environment are threefold, namely: a) motivating conditions which encourage people to learn, and ensure that they feel acknowledged and rewarded; b) diverse opportunities to learn; c) feedback during the learning process and on its completion.

The evaluation found that the practical requirements for quality adult learning provision include:

- good content, plan(s) and materials and a coherent flexible programme;
- funding arrangements that enable adult learning centres to operate in an efficient, cost
- effective, sustainable and transparent way;
- good recruitment, selection and training procedures to select good personnel;

³ Research voor Beleid (2008) ALPINE - Adult Learning Professions in Europe. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

⁴ Research voor Beleid (2005) Developing local learning centres and learning partnerships as part of Member States' targets for reaching the Lisbon goals in the field of education and training.

- public relations to ensure that the learning offer is known to potential learners;
- partnerships with external stakeholders.

2.4.2 GINCO: Grundtvig International Network of Course Organisers

GINCO, the Grundtvig International Network of Course Organisers⁵, brings together 21 partners which are providers of Grundtvig-funded international training courses for adult learning staff with a view to enhancing opportunities for professional development. The courses are provided by an international Grundtvig partnership or by individual adult education organisations. GINCO provides a forum for co-operation and exchange of expertise and support for the development, promotion, delivery, accreditation, evaluation and sustainability of the training courses. Planned outputs include: policy papers; advocacy activities; guidelines; a system for quality assessment of courses; a course quality label; conferences and training days. GINCO plans to link up with existing networks in the field of adult learning and the sustainability of the network in the post-funding period is also being addressed.

2.4.3 Approaches to the quality assurance of adult learning in Austria

In Austria the quality focus is on the two important pillars of adult education: 1) high standards – the quality of providers and 2) high professionalism – the quality of the adult educator.

1) Adult education in Austria is characterized by approximately 3000 heterogeneous providers. A range of quality management systems and procedures is in use with the result that providers who offer learning programmes in various federal states are obliged to spend time and money on gaining admission to the quality assurance systems of several federal states. Therefore the Ö-CERT (AT-Cert) has been developed by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture for transparency and to simplify administration and promote an overall strategy of quality. The target of the framework is the mutual recognition of quality by the federal states and the federal government of Austria. The starting date for the Ö-CERT (AT-Cert) is 1 January 2011.

To receive an Ö-Cert and be registered as a quality provider of adult education the provider must hold one of the valid quality management systems or quality assurance procedures on the Ö-Cert list and meet a number of requirements regarding underpinning principles, organisation and the learning programme. The common denominator of the system is external audit. The vision is for an EU-Cert of quality in adult education.

2) The Austrian Academy for Continuing Education (wba)⁶ is a new approach to recognising the formally, non-formally and informally acquired competences of adult educators. It was established in 2007 in recognition of the lack of standardised education for adult educators; the need to recognise adult educators' previously acquired competences; the need to professionalise the field and the need for transparency. The process of recognition includes: the identification of competence; guidance through the certification process (no courses are offered); a certification workshop; the award of a qualification when all requirements are met. The core competences of adult educators for the award of a certificate, for example, include: educational theory and practice and a range of skills including: management skills; counselling skills; library and information management skills; and social and personal skills.

2.5 Parallel Round Tables on Sessions 1 and 2

The presentations in Sessions 1 and 2 fed into the discussion in three parallel Round Tables as follows:

⁵ www.ginconet.eu

⁶ www.wba.or.at

In Round Table 1: *Indicators of quality of adult learning at systems level*, the discussion revolved around three main issues, namely, identifying indicators to ensure quality at systems level; the challenges faced by countries and regions in relation to quality assurance; proposals on the next step forward.

The challenges identified by participants in Round Table 1 on the topic of indicators of quality at systems level related to: finding indicators which reflect the richness of vocational and non-vocational formal, non-formal and informal adult learning; developing agreed indicators which provide a measure of the context; measuring important issues in adult learning; the huge investment needed for effective quality assurance at systems level; collecting data, particularly on non-formal adult learning; incentivising quality assurance for stakeholders; resistance to quality assurance in the non-formal sector; involving adult learners in evaluation. Participants were of the opinion that quality assurance 'does not have to cover everything'. Its priority should be to improve the effectiveness of adult learning. It will bring an unaccustomed accountability to adult education centres which are recently coming under scrutiny as governments in many countries review the cost-effectiveness of funding to the sector.

In Round Table 2: *Indicators of quality in adult learning (formal and non-formal) at provider level*, the discussion focused on the challenges to be faced in assuring quality at provider level and no consensus was arrived at on how best provider-level quality assurance might be developed. The merits of top-down and bottom up approaches were discussed. The examples of countries where courses and providers are accredited were discussed.

In Round Table 3: *The role of an ALP competence profile in improving quality in adult learning*, participants were in agreement that a European set of key competences for adult learning staff helps Member States to improve their adult learning systems and that the competence profile presented provides a good starting point for developing such a framework. It was observed that it is sometimes easier to get providers' agreement on a set of competences if they come from a European rather than from national level.

The fact that adult learning is strongly interwoven with other education sectors was raised. Should HE, VET and secondary schools add specific adult learning competences to their own competence profiles?

Overall, participants agreed on the added-value represented by the set of key competences presented. However, some were of the opinion that it would not be easy to transfer it to the whole adult learning sector across Europe in different formal and non-formal education areas (VET, HE, second-chance provision and cultural education). To do this, it would be important that the set of key competences was supported at political, structural and practical levels.

The recommendations from the three Round Tables are presented under **3. Recommendations**.

2.6 Session 3: Systemic Approaches to Quality Assurance

Two presentations were made in Session 3 on the topic of systemic approaches to quality assurance.

2.6.1 Certificate for quality for further education in Switzerland

eduQua⁷ the methodological-didactical quality label for adult learning which has been in existence in Switzerland since 2000 defines six quality criteria as follows: i) offers that satisfy the educational needs and demands of the customers / society; ii) learning outcomes for participants; iii) a transparent representation of offers and of the pedagogical concept; iv) customer-oriented, economical, efficient and effective services; v) committed

⁷ www.eduqua.ch

educators who are didactically and professionally up-to-date; vi) evidence of quality development and quality assurance.

To date 950 institutions have been certified by one of the seven certifying agencies. eduQua target groups include: private institutions; providers of labour market measures; state-subsidised institutions; in-company continuing education providers.

Critical issues include: how the provider communicates quality; how the customer understands quality; whether s/he is willing to understand the messages communicated by the provider; the real facts behind a customer's decision to go to a particular provider. Issues for the future development of eduQua include the new impact from ISO 17021 and the issue of internationalising the label.

2.6.2 Quality Standards and Accreditation for Adult Learning in Romania

The current quality assurance system in formal CVT in Romania dates from 2004 and focuses on access, provision, outcomes and partnership. A consistent methodological framework is in place and the quality cycle is complete at system level although the instruments need to be improved⁸. The system is based on a three-level approach including: CVT providers who carry out self-evaluation and maintain the accreditation conditions; Local Accreditation Commissions (LACs) which accredit providers; carry out monitoring visits; organise final examinations and provide evaluators/assessors. The third level is that of the National Adult Training Board (NATB) which co-ordinates the visits by the LACs; participates in monitoring visits and settles appeals against decisions by the LACs. There are certain weaknesses in the system: there are only two output-oriented indicators, namely, drop-out rate and graduation rate; impact indicators are missing; employers' satisfaction ratings are not gathered; internal quality management systems are lacking in the LACs, in the NATB and among providers who, as a rule, do not use performance indicators. At the end of 2009 the system was operational in 3,429 CVT providers with 10,421 training programmes.

Quality assurance in non-formal & informal CVT adopts a different approach. There is a focus on the development of occupational standards (570 available); assessment of competences (process, instruments); certification of assessors; certification of internal and external auditors; accreditation of Competences Assessment Centres and institution building. However, an intermediate institutional level between NATB and the providers is lacking and there is a need for a greater focus on counseling and on assessors.

The Calisis project (2009 – 2012)⁹ aims to develop and pilot a quality assurance system for CVT which will be compatible with EQARF. Scenarios being considered include: improving the existing quality assurance system; moving the accent from the quality assurance of the training provision to the quality assurance of the assessment of learning outcomes; a common quality assurance approach and a common quality assurance coordination for all VET systems. The advantage of the first scenario is that it allows for the pilot implementation of quality assurance procedures and tools developed under the project. The second and third scenarios mean that the achievements of the project could be easily adapted.

Discussion

The fact that eduQua's does not focus on the financial management of the adult learning institution was raised. In response it was pointed out that financial management is monitored by funders and that, in turn, eduQua provides evidence to funders on the effectiveness of the programme. In response to a question on the role of indicators in eduQua it was pointed out that although eduQua does not use indicators it is suggested to providers that

⁸ www.cnfpa.ro

⁹ www.cnfpa.ro/calisis/

they identify indicators to measure the effectiveness of their work. It was considered that an E-Cert would be valuable to address the proliferation of quality labels and certificates throughout Europe.

2.7 Session 4: Quality in Lifelong Learning: Lessons from LLP Projects

Several studies have been launched in the field of quality assurance in VET and different initiatives to increase synergies with the Leonardo da Vinci programme within the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) have been taken, including the specific Call launched in 2006 under the Accompanying Measures and the mid-2010 specific Call for Leonardo da Vinci projects on EQARF. In addition, at least twenty-three Grundtvig projects have focused directly on the issue of quality assurance in adult education since 2000.

2.7.1 QALL - Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning with a focus on VET and Adult Education

The current European thematic network, Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning [QALL] (2009 – 2012)¹⁰, aims to highlight good practice in quality assurance in lifelong learning by facilitating the networking and mainstreaming of the results and outcomes of previous and existing LLP-funded centralised and decentralised projects in VET (Leonardo da Vinci) and in adult education (Grundtvig).

The overall aim is the identification of strategies, tools, mechanisms, approaches and activities developed by LLP projects throughout Europe to promote quality in adult learning. The objectives of the project are to facilitate networking and mainstreaming of results and outcomes of projects in the education and training landscape; to foster expert and stakeholder discussion of quality assurance related topics in the field of VET and adult education. While the majority of the projects identified focus on VET, it is considered that QALL will provide useful insights and messages for non-vocational adult learning.

2.7.2 Quality in the new scenario for adults learning: the QUALC project

The focus of the QUALC project¹¹ was on quality in adult learning centres that provide blended learning opportunities. QUALC was an educational network which drew on expertise from eight countries through a Grundtvig project for quality assurance of adult and community learning. It aimed to support adult learning centres in measuring how successful they were in providing learning experiences for adults in the community and in engaging stakeholders in the process of continuous quality improvement.

The specific aim of QUALC was to transfer and adapt the results of previous European projects in order to establish a quality label (institutional accreditation) for adult learning centres which demonstrate substantial progress in adopting and implementing quality criteria and processes that guarantee a smooth integration of and access to, formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities to adult learners.

The QUALC network developed a range of products including: a state-of-the-art report on quality assurance of adult learning centres in the countries participating in the project; a handbook which outlined the results of the QUALC project and highlighted the innovative QUALC quality approach, which could be adopted to improve quality for the key stakeholders in adult learning; and a separate piloting guide to accompany the handbook during the evaluative phase of the project development. Overall, QUALC represents an innovative and unique quality scheme and process based on a matrix of criteria specifically designed for adult learning centres.

¹⁰ <http://www.qall.eu>

¹¹ <http://efquel.org/qualc/>

2.8 Parallel Round Tables on Sessions 3 and 4

The presentations in Sessions 3 and 4 fed into the discussion in three parallel Round Tables on as follows:

In Round Table 4: *The role of accreditation of providers in improving quality in adult learning*, it was noted that countries that have accreditation systems (e.g. CH and HU) have noticed that their impact to date has been small. Their purpose is to re-assure customers; enable providers to seek funding; give providers confidence and credibility; and, in many countries, qualify providers to participate in tendering processes. Learners demand evaluation, so the customers are driving the demand for quality. But quality is not just about protecting the customer. It is also about shaping lifelong learning.

It is necessary to find a balance between bureaucracy and results in terms of quality assurance. A neutral accrediting body is necessary otherwise there are tensions in the system. Assessors can be the weak link. Accreditation of providers is expensive and does not necessarily assure quality. Additional components are necessary. Institutions need to develop a quality culture. EU-level standards, such as profiles for assessors, may help in situations of conflict of interests. External experts are useful (e.g. HU, MT) but this can be difficult to organise in small countries.

In Round Table 5: *The role of users in improving quality in adult learning* the discussion mainly focused on learners and what they can do to improve quality in adult learning. Giving formal and informal feedback to the provider and the system as a whole is a key role of adult learners. They can generate innovation to improve system/content/methods and insist on flexibility in the learning offer. Formal evaluation which involves users is very important at all stages of the learning endeavour.

Challenges to the role of users in improving the quality of adult learning include a possible lack of influence on their part in practice; an imbalance between supply and real demand; lack of structures to support learner feedback to providers.

Participants in Round Table 6: *The function of quality assurance in communication with adult learning stakeholders* agreed that adult learning stakeholders include: learners; providers; the social partners; central, regional and local government; and organisations representing vulnerable groups. Quality assurance approaches were discussed. Should quality assurance in adult learning be more focused on external accreditation or internal self-evaluation? Should it focus on the learner, on outcomes? It was agreed that quality assurance needs reliability, credibility and transparency to enable communication with stakeholders. It was considered likely that there are more challenges in the adult education and training sector to achieving these three dimensions of quality assurance than in other education sectors.

The recommendations from the three Round Tables are presented under **3. Recommendations**.

2.9 Reflection Note: Monitoring quality in the adult learning sector: as a learning process

The presentation *Monitoring quality in the adult learning sector: as a learning process* presented a number of reflections on the challenges to addressing quality assurance in adult learning.

To address the “productive plurality” in adult learning the development of a “multi-level quality architecture” is required for quality assurance. It is necessary to keep in mind different levels and perspectives. The risk of blurring the borders and neglecting the differences is more a challenge than the fact that there are different rationales and concepts for/of quality.

The quality discourse on different levels is quite diverse (time perspective, setting of priorities etc). There are different rationales which are often not connected to each other –

quality of the system, the organisation, the learning infrastructure, the teaching and the learning. Frequently there is an over-emphasis on organisational-oriented quality models when the learner or the teaching-learning process should be the starting point. Notwithstanding the existence of a spectrum of quality assurance issues - input, process, output, outcome - there is real evidence of “outcome-fixation”.

The adult education sector is affected by an “unfinished” professionalisation. The challenge is to link quality issues with professional development (e.g. professional standards). The organisational dimension of quality development is important, but the professional dimension should be integrated so as to lessen the risk of de-professionalisation.

The specific situation of the adult education sector has to be taken into account. There are limitations in relation to the transfer of models from other educational fields. All attempts to develop a common system will fail if a comprehensive expert-culture between the different reference systems and levels is not built up. One of the advantages of being late as a sector to the field of quality assurance is that despite the significant differences between VET and HE and the adult education sector, there are possibilities of learning (‘short-cuts’) in respect of building up processes and the use of existing ‘tools’. The development of a structural mode/reference framework rather than a set of indicators should be the aim. Otherwise there is the danger of getting lost in a mass of detailed quality components.

The response – and the challenge - is to build an expert culture in relation to quality assurance in adult learning and to build synergies through benchmarking networks and consortia.

2.10 Plenary Panel on overall recommendations from the Workshop

The members of the final Plenary Panel included representatives of four member states (CZ; IE; MT and RO) two of which (IE and MT) have national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) to which quality assurance is integral. The recommendations from the plenary panel members are presented under **3. Recommendations**.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this section arise from the Workshop discussions and recommendations during:

- the first Plenary Panel;
- Round Tables 1 – 6;
- the final Plenary Panel.

A range of opinions about the development of quality assurance mechanisms in adult learning emerged from the Workshop participants.

Participants directly involved in adult learning through ministries, providers and associations believed that European and national co-operation with other education and training sectors could produce good learning about quality structures and processes. But they were also of the opinion that at the current stage of development of the quality assurance of adult learning, separate approaches and mechanisms are required to accommodate the distinct characteristics of adult learning and make it and its outcomes more visible.

Other participants less directly involved in adult learning tended to opt for integrated overarching structures and processes incorporating those existing for VET and HE and, in the medium- and long-term future, embracing formal and non-formal adult education and training within a lifelong learning approach.

Another view represented a more or less compromise approach which proposed a combination of both these approaches.

Therefore, the presentation here of the overall recommendations from the Workshop strives to reflect the different points of view where relevant.

3.1 Structures

Divergence of opinion was most in evidence in the discussions on possible structures for quality assurance in adult learning. On the one hand, it was considered that EQAVET (VET) and the ESGs (European Standards and Guidelines for HE) provide a good basis for the development of a quality assurance framework for lifelong learning, including adult learning. This would involve moving beyond a sectoral model of quality assurance to an inclusive, integrated learner-focused model of quality assurance for all of learning to facilitate the smooth mobility of individuals between levels and sectors.

On the other hand, there was the opinion that the quality assurance of adult learning should be considered a domain in its own right and that while EQAVET and quality in HE should be connected and linked with this effort they should not dominate or incorporate it. Moreover, participants believed that while an overall common approach to quality assurance in adult learning would be useful, its application should not be prescriptive but rather adapted according to the forms of adult learning and their intended outcomes. The way forward lies with generic processes and tools from which adult education providers could choose and/or create their own approaches.

A third opinion considered that there should be common objectives for a European framework for quality in lifelong learning which would cover transversal quality issues and some common objectives as well as specific objectives for each sector. Specific objectives have already been identified for/by the VET and HE sectors so a parallel process is required for adult learning within such a European framework

3.2 Stakeholders

All participants agreed that dialogue between the key stakeholders at European and national levels at the different stages of development of policies and structures is vital to achieving a quality assurance system that is a mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches. In addition, the involvement of the social partners is critical to ensuring their confidence in the outcomes of adult learning, of which they are among the prime users.

The voice of providers of adult learning opportunities needs to be heard. Many providers are small to medium sized institutions/organisations so complex approaches to quality assurance will place undue burdens on them and open up a gap between small and large providers.

Practitioners are key determinants of the quality of adult learning processes and outcomes and as such may be given a strong role in the development as well as the implementation of quality assurance systems.

The systematic and structured involvement of learners in quality assurance needs to be facilitated from the outset. User groups of learners have a key role to play in this regard.

3.3 Indicators

Participants made the point that it would be essential to distinguish between quality indicators and benchmarks and between quality indicators and performance indicators.

It would be important to have indicators that demonstrate what is happening in adult education in local, social, regional and national contexts. Thus, quality indicators for adult education will need to be broad-ranging to encompass all aspects of adult education while, at the same time, being focused, practical and achievable.

Any new indicators or further work on the existing indicators should support integration across education and training sectors and measures to ensure smooth progression for adult learners through levels and sectors. In addition, to start with at least, indicators should focus on the most salient, relevant, and easy to collect data so as to avoid making the quality process over-complicated and burdensome.

Indicators might cover: the education profile of the population; participation in lifelong learning; participation of vulnerable groups; the relationship of the adult learning system to local/regional/national environments; the share of accredited providers; the continuing professional development of adult learning personnel; progression to employment/self-employment; citizenship outcomes. Consideration should be given to a new indicator for the participation in lifelong learning of low-skilled and low-qualified adults who have not achieved Level 3 EQF qualifications. The number of drop-outs also needs to be captured. An indicator on the quality of the response of adult education to individual's and employers' needs is required. In addition, since not everybody participates in adult education to find employment, there needs to be an indicator to reflect other outcomes.

Participants were of the opinion that process indicators are also required so as to measure the quality of learning processes for individuals and ensure that for the individual every encounter with adult learning is positive and encourages a lifelong approach to learning and development.

3.4 Role of the European Commission

Participants were of the view that a key role for the European Commission would be to build on the outcomes of this Workshop by taking forward the work on quality assurance in adult learning at European level.

A European approach to quality assurance in adult learning would: enable and encourage mutual learning between different countries; facilitate the collection of evidence about the benefits of adult learning at a time when evidence-based policies and funding schemes are increasingly being implemented; and facilitate the recognition and validation of non-formal learning outcomes in NQFs and EQF. A first step in the form of a research report on quality in the sector funded by the Commission is already on the agenda.

According to participants, European tools to support quality assurance in adult learning that might be considered include; a charter of common standards, common values and rules of evaluation; a European certification and training of assessors/inspectors for monitoring quality assurance in adult learning.

Transnational co-operation has scope for: improving quality in adult learning. Co-operation between countries might be supported within the Open Method of Co-ordination to enable a deeper consideration of work done on quality assurance in VET and HE and to address the issue of quality in the various dimensions of adult learning. In addition, adult learning processes could make a significant contribution to EQA-VET as many adults learn in VET.

The combination of a top down and bottom up involvement of stakeholders in developing a quality framework for adult learning will help form a social basis for a common agreed quality framework in the future. If there is agreement ultimately on a common quality framework for adult learning - *within* an overarching quality framework for lifelong learning or on a *parallel but stand-alone* sectoral basis - the Commission could facilitate a 'think-tank' of stakeholders for the development of guidelines for implementing the framework.

The funding and reach of the Grundtvig programme should be further harnessed for the development of quality assurance systems for adult learning.

Ultimately, there is a need for an evaluation of the impact and outcomes of existing quality assurance in adult learning. A key research question to be addressed is: *Is there a positive*

relationship between quality assurance systems and the quality of learning processes and outcomes for adults?

ANNEX 1

WORKSHOP AGENDA

ADULT LEARNING ACTION PLAN

**WORKSHOP ON
IMPROVING QUALITY
IN THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR
Brussels 30th June – 1st July 2010**

Agenda

30th June 2010

10.30 ARRIVAL

11.00 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Marta Ferreira, Maike Koops - European Commission, DG Education and Culture

11.15 QUALITY AND ADULT LEARNING IN EUROPE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES - BACKGROUND REPORT

GHK International

11.45 SESSION 1 ADULT LEARNING, VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION

11.45 KEY PRESENTATION: THE EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Sophie Weisswange - European Commission

12.15 PLENARY PANEL: ADULT LEARNING, VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION: DO WE NEED A COMMON APPROACH TO QUALITY?

Chair: N.N.

- *Magda Trantallidi, Ministry of Education - Greek*
- *Sue Waddington, European Association for the Education of Adults*
- *Sarah Colmar, TADCO Leisure Ltd and Training & Development Consultants Ltd- United Kingdom*
- *Christian Tauch, European Commission, DG Education and Culture*

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 SESSION 2 PROFESSIONALS AND PROFESSIONALISM

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

14:00 A set of key competences for adult learning professionals: strategies for improving the quality of adult learning staff

Simon Broek and Bert-Jan Buiskool, Research voor Beleid - The Netherlands

14:30 GINCO: Grundtvig International Network of Course Organisers

Guy Tilkin, Landcommanderij Alden Biesen - Belgium

15:00 Ö-Cert, an overall framework of quality for adult education – the specific roles of professionals, Austria

Johanna Weismann - Austria

15.30 ROUND TABLES ON SESSION 1 AND 2 (with coffee break)

Round Table 1: *Indicators of quality of adult learning at systems level in a region / country*

Round Table 2: *Indicators of quality in adult learning (formal and non-formal) at provider level*

Round Table 3: *The role of an ALP competence profile in improving quality in adult learning*

16.30 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ROUND TABLES

17.00 END OF DAY 1

1st July 2010

09.00 SESSION 3: SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

09.00 PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

- Certificate for quality for further education in Switzerland
Stephan Schönholzer, Schweizerischen Verband für Weiterbildung - Switzerland

10.00

- Quality Standards and Accreditation for Adult Learning in Romania
Ana Costin, Consiliul National de Formare Profesionala a Adultilor - Romania

10.30 Coffee

10.45 SESSION 4: QUALITY IN LIFELONG LEARNING - LESSONS FROM LLP PROJECTS

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

- 10.45 • QALLL - Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning with a focus on VET and Adult Education
Carin Dániel Ramirez-Schiller, National Agency for Lifelong Learning - Austria

- 11.15 • Quality in the new scenario for adults learning. The QUALC project
Carl Holmberg, Centre for Flexible Learning - Sweden

12.00 ROUND TABLES ON SESSIONS 3 AND 4

Round Table 4: *The role of accreditation of providers in improving quality in adult learning*

Round Table 5: *The role of users in improving quality in adult learning*

Round Table 6: *The function of quality assurance in communication with adult learning stakeholders*

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ROUND TABLES

14.30 REFLECTION NOTE: MONITORING QUALITY IN THE ADULT LEARNING SECTOR

Wolfgang Jütte, University of Bielefeld - Germany

15.00 PLENARY PANEL ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Chair: *Dana Stroie, National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training - Romania*

- *Barbara Kelly, Further Education and Training Awards Council - Ireland*
- *Suzanne Gatt, Faculty of Education, University of Malta - Malta*
- *Jakub Starek, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports - Czech Republic*

15.45 END OF DAY 2

ANNEX 2

QUESTIONS FOR THE PLENARY SESSIONS ON DAY 1 & DAY 2

DAY 1

PLENARY PANEL: ADULT LEARNING, VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION: DO WE NEED A COMMON APPROACH TO QUALITY?

GENERAL QUESTIONS – TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE PLENARY PANEL DISCUSSION

- A. When it comes to quality assurance, what are the links between adult learning, vocational education and training (VET), lifelong guidance and higher education (HE)?
- B. Specifically, could EQARF have a role in the development of quality assurance mechanisms for the adult learning sector by opening up to adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning? Or should a separate process which could later be integrated into EQA-VET be developed?
- C. To what extent are existing tools for quality assurance in VET, guidance and HE transferable to the adult learning sector? What would need to be done to ensure a successful transfer?
- D. What are the main challenges to quality assurance in adult learning?
- E. What models of good practice exist at EU and/or national levels?

DAY 2

PLENARY PANEL ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

GENERAL QUESTIONS – TO BE DISCUSSED IN THE PLENARY PANEL DISCUSSION

- A. Should the approach to quality and quality assurance in adult learning be 'top-down', 'bottom-up' or a mix of both approaches? What are the advantages attaching to each approach?
- B. Should a European forum on quality and quality assurance in adult learning be established?
- C. How can mutual trust be built among adult learning stakeholders?

ANNEX 3

QUESTIONS FOR THE ROUND TABLE SESSIONS ON DAY 1 & DAY 2

DAY 1

SESSION 1: ADULT LEARNING, VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION

SESSION 2: PROFESSIONALS AND PROFESSIONALISM

ROUND TABLE 1 INDICATORS OF QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING AT SYSTEMS LEVEL IN A REGION/COUNTRY

- Q 1** What would be useful indicators of quality in adult learning at systems level in a region/country? Why?
- Q 2** Please identify examples of systems-level indicators at national/regional level?
- Q 3** What are the challenges in devising and using quality indicators at systems level in a country/region?
- Q 4** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to devising and using quality indicators for adult learning at systems level in a country/region?

ROUND TABLE 2 INDICATORS OF QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING AT PROVIDER LEVEL

- Q 1** What would be useful indicators of quality in adult learning at provider level?
- Q 2** Please identify examples of provider-level indicators
- Q 3** What are the challenges in devising and using quality indicators at provider level?
- Q4.** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to devising and using quality indicators for adult learning at provider level

ROUND TABLE 3 THE ROLE OF AN ALP COMPETENCE PROFILE IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

- Q 1** What would be the role of a Competence Profile in addressing quality in adult learning?
- Q 2** What are/should be the differences, if any, between ALPS in non-formal adult learning and ALPs in VET and HE?
- Q 3** What are the challenges in defining a competence profile for ALPS of the future?
- Q 4** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to using the ALPS Competence Profile presented today (or in relation to another such competence profile)

DAY 2

SESSION 3: SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

SESSION 4: QUALITY IN LIFELONG LEARNING – LESSONS FROM LLP PROJECTS

ROUND TABLE 4 THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION OF PROVIDERS IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

- Q 1** What is the role of the accreditation of providers in improving quality in adult learning?
- Q 2** Please identify examples of the accreditation of providers at national/regional level
- Q 3** What are the challenges in accrediting providers?
- Q 4** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to the accreditation of providers in improving quality in adult learning

ROUND TABLE 5 THE ROLE OF USERS IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN ADULT LEARNING

- Q 1** What is the role of users in improving quality in adult learning?
- Q 2** Please identify examples of how users have been able to improve the quality of adult learning at national/regional level
- Q 3** What are the challenges to the role of users in improving quality in adult learning?
- Q 4** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to the roles of users in improving quality in adult learning

ROUND TABLE 6 THE FUNCTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN COMMUNICATION WITH ADULT LEARNING STAKEHOLDERS

- Q 1** What is quality assurance in adult learning?
- Q 2** What is the function of quality assurance in communication with adult learning stakeholders?
- Q 3** Please identify examples of how quality assurance has been used in communication with adult learning stakeholders at national/regional level
- Q 4** Please make 3 recommendations in relation to the function of quality assurance in communication with adult learning stakeholders

ANNEX 4

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ANNEX 5

BACKGROUND REPORT FOR THE WORKSHOP