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European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Evaluation for improving student outcomes

Messages for quality assurance policies

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Foreword

Improving European education and training system quality is a key target in Europe's strategy to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy by 2020. Member states are developing and establishing quality assurance mechanisms closely linked to social, economic or political contexts, helping schools and vocational training institutions become learning organisations in which quality improvement is continuous. External evaluation and self-assessment play a key role. They aim to improve student outcomes, both in academic achievement and social and personal development, and to prepare them to move successfully into employment. The study visits programme has the potential to influence the development of effective quality assurance systems at local, regional, national and European levels.

The study visits programme, for education and vocational training specialists and decision-makers, is part of the transversal programme of the lifelong learning programme (LLP). Study visits cover various themes in line with the priorities of the European education and training policy agenda. Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions is one of the most popular topics in the programme, with approximately 20 visits being organised each year. The programme allows decision-makers and practitioners to explore issues of education and vocational training quality with their peers from other European countries. Two peer learning study visits, specifically addressed to high level policy and decision-makers, were organised in Vilnius and Hamburg in 2010 on external evaluation and self-assessment in schools and training institutions: they provided excellent opportunities for discussion, exchange of innovative ideas and practices, networking and future cooperation between the participants.

Cedefop, on behalf of the European Commission, has coordinated the programme at European level since 2008. As part of its support for quality in the study visits programme, this Cedefop publication aims to provide policy and decision-makers with recommendations on external evaluation and self-assessment and building trust between stakeholders to ensure quality in education and training provision. We hope this publication will be a valuable tool to help develop a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement in schools and training institutions in Europe.

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Acting Director

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1. Introduction

This publication highlights a number of key messages for policy and decision-makers responsible for setting the conditions for developing a culture of evaluation in schools and training institutions. They are based on the discussions and outcomes of a workshop Cedefop organised in Bonn in February 2011 on improving quality in schools and VET institutions (Cedefop, 2011d).

The workshop participants discussed the findings of study visits on quality assurance mechanisms in schools and vocational training institutions and, more specifically, of two 'peer learning' visits that took place in Vilnius and Hamburg in 2010 (Cedefop, 2011b). The recommendations presented in this publication are based on experience in developing and implementing quality assurance policies in education and vocational training. They reflect the views of different stakeholders in education and vocational training: ministry officials, representatives of local authorities and national agencies responsible for external evaluation and providing guidance for self-assessment, educational and vocational training inspectors, directors and quality assurance managers in education and vocational training institutions.

This publication also draws on Cedefop's work on gathering, analysing and disseminating information on quality in VET.

2. EU policy developments in education and training quality assurance

Europe has laid down a strategy to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It has set five ambitious goals - on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy - to be reached by 2020 (Council of the European Union, 2010). To ensure smart growth and achieve the strategy goals it is important to improve the quality of education and training, with access for all citizens, strengthen research and business performance, and promote transfer of innovation throughout the European Union. To aid recovery from the economic crisis, all Europeans should have the opportunity to acquire, upgrade and broaden their knowledge, skills and competences throughout their lives.

The strategy recognises that high-quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. The Council conclusions on a Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Council of European Union, 2009) set improving the quality and efficiency of education and vocational training as one of its strategic objective and stress the importance of developing effective quality assurance systems. The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training, adopted on 7 December 2010, calls on participating countries to establish common quality assurance frameworks at national level by the end of 2015 to ensure high quality of VET provision (Bruges Communiqué, 2010).

The quality of education and training systems has been at the heart of many European discussions and developments over the past decade. The European Commission, the Parliament and the Council adopted in 2001 a recommendation on European cooperation in

quality evaluation in school education (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2001). This recommendation invited Member States to safeguard the quality of school education as a basis for lifelong learning, to encourage self-assessment by schools and to clarify the purposes and conditions for self-assessment. It also called for external evaluation, in addition to self-assessment. The Council conclusions on improving the quality of teacher education (Council of the European Union, 2007) in their turn stressed that initial and continuing education and training of teachers should help them understand the principles and values of self-assessment, and how external evaluation can support self-assessment.

Quality-related developments in Higher Education are part of the Bologna Process. Cooperation platforms established include the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2011) in 2000, the European University Association (EUA, 2011) in 2003 and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA, 2011). In 2005 the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (former ENQA) adopted the European standards and guidelines on quality assurance in higher education (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005).

In vocational education and training (VET) significant developments have taken place under the Copenhagen process of enhanced European VET cooperation. Principles and indicators for quality assurance were developed and form an integral part of the European Common Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2009a). This is a reference instrument to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems. The work of the Member States on quality assurance in VET is supported through

the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training Network (EQAVET, 2011), comprising representatives of Member States, Candidate Countries and the European Economic Area countries, the European social partners, the European Commission, ETF and Cedefop.

Cedefop supports the implementation of the EQAVET recommendation through advice and expertise to the EQAVET steering committee and through its own analysis of national and sectoral approaches to quality in VET. Cedefop also runs a virtual community on quality assurance in VET (Cedefop, 2011a) which addresses quality experts and education/VET stakeholders and aims at disseminating the work done at EU level, gathering and sharing information, and promoting the exchange of ideas and examples of good practice.

Quality assurance is also an underpinning pillar of the EU tools and frameworks that promote mobility of European citizens/students and recognition of their qualifications and learning achievements, namely the European Qualifications Framework (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2008) and the European credit system for vocational education and training (European Parliament; Council of the European Union, 2009b).

3. Study visits focus on quality assurance

The study visits programme for education and vocational training specialists and decision-makers is part of the transversal programme of the lifelong learning programme (LLP). It contributes to improving education and training policies at local, regional and national level, through sharing of experience, expertise and examples of good practice on priority topics of the European education and training policy agenda. Study visits bring together different educational and vocational training decision-makers and practitioners. The largest groups in the academic year 2010-11 were head teachers and teacher trainers (25%), directors of education and vocational training institutions (15.6%), educational and vocational training inspectors (11.4%), representatives of local, regional and national authorities (11.5%) and representatives of the social partners (6%). Cedefop has coordinated the programme at European level since 2008.

Quality assurance mechanisms in schools and training institutions is one of the most popular topics in the programme, with more than 60 visits being organised since its beginning in 2008. Study visits on this topic examine recent national developments, initiatives and measures in Europe to raise education and vocational training quality, including assessing student competences, leadership and management, institutional self-assessment and external evaluation.
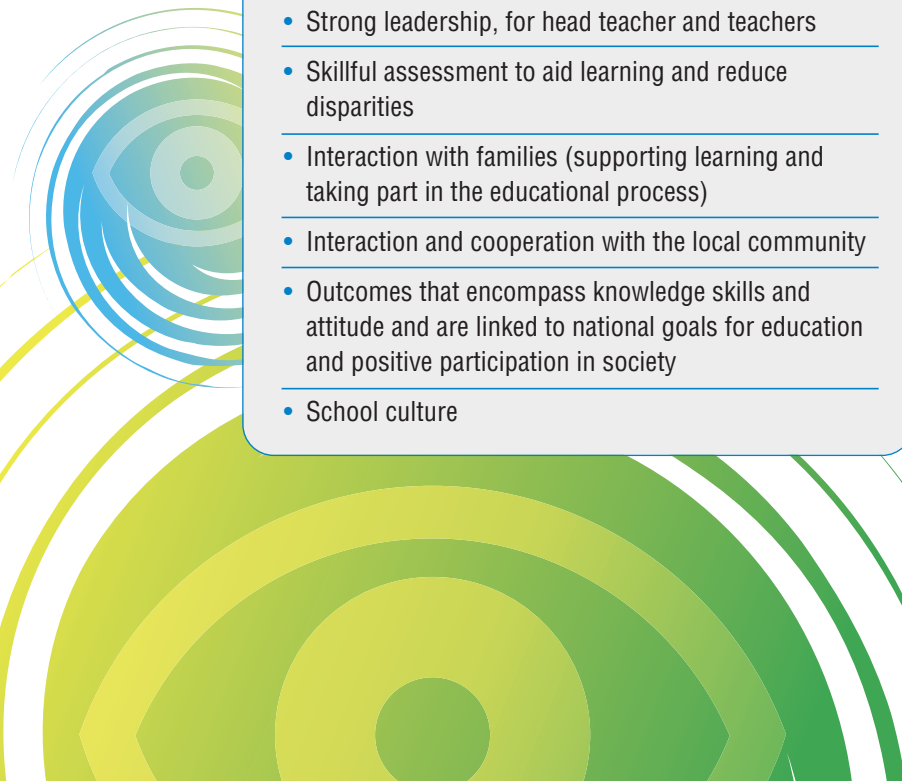
4. Quality assurance trends in Member State schools and training institutions

Study visits show that monitoring and evaluation of schools and training institutions are changing in many countries across Europe (Cedefop, 2011c), partly as a result of international tests (for example PISA international student assessment) and EU level policy developments seeking better education and training systems.

Education and training systems in Europe are moving cautiously towards less centralised school administration and governance, giving more autonomy to schools and training institutions. This requires greater accountability from education and training providers through effective quality assurance mechanisms. The mechanisms countries adopt are closely linked to their social, economic or political context. Despite the different approaches to quality frameworks, standards, indicators, criteria and procedures, the common goal is improving student outcomes, in terms of academic achievement as well as social and personal development and employability (see Figure 1). Parents want better education and training for their children, while adults want and need to update their skills and competences to be able to find a job and remain in employment. Companies look for skilled and competent employees to continue being competitive in a global market.

Evaluation of school performance and assessment of student outcomes is increasingly being carried out in Europe.

Figure 1. **Quality in education as seen by the participants of study visit 65 in Osnabrueck (DE) in 2010**

- Healthy learners
- Healthy environment
- Well-planned and objective school goals
- Relevant curricula
- Student-centered teaching approaches
- Well-managed classroom and schools
- Strong leadership, for head teacher and teachers
- Skillful assessment to aid learning and reduce disparities
- Interaction with families (supporting learning and taking part in the educational process)
- Interaction and cooperation with the local community
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge skills and attitude and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society
- School culture

4.1. External evaluation

In many countries there is a shift from inspection, historically used to check school and training institution compliance with legislation, to external evaluation to help schools become learning organisations in which quality improvement is a continuous process. Specific organisations are being set up to evaluate the quality of education and training institutions and to provide them with methodological assistance and guidance to improve quality.

Example 1. **Agencies for school evaluation in Lithuania and Hamburg (Germany)**

> A National agency for school evaluation NMVA (Nacionalinė mokyklų vertinimo agentūra ([1])) was established in 2005 in Lithuania to carry out external evaluation of schools and support them to develop their self-assessment systems. The vision of the agency is to 'change the culture of evaluation from fear to attitude, from compliance to improvement, instruction to agreement, opinions to evidence and from control to reflection'.
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> An Institute for school monitoring, IFBM (Institut für Bildungsmonitoring ([2])), was established in 2006 in Hamburg to carry out school evaluation. Its system of evaluation is focused on school processes and its philosophy is 'better school processes lead to better outcomes for pupils'.

([1]) Nacionalinė mokyklų vertinimo agentūra. Available from Internet: http://www.nmva.smm.lt/ltl/ .

([2]) Institut für Bildungsmonitoring. Available from Internet: http://www.bildungsmonitoring.hamburg.de/index.php/ .

The quality of school performance and delivery is evaluated in four main areas:

- processes at classroom level, relating to the quality of learning and teaching;
- processes at school level, relating to the institution as a learning, social, and professional place;
- school environment: relations between the school and parents, as well as links between the school and local community;
- student outcomes, measured in terms of academic achievement, personal and social development, and graduate career paths.

Example 2. **External evaluation criteria in Lithuania and Hamburg (Germany)**

Lithuania
- school culture (e.g. ethos, aspirations and school relations);
- teaching and learning (e.g. organisation, quality of teaching, quality of learning, including teacher/student dialogue);
- achievements (e.g. progress and academic and other achievements);
- educational support (e.g. pedagogical and psychological support, career guidance);
- strategic management (e.g. self-assessment, school strategy, and human resource and facility management).

Hamburg
- leadership and management (e.g. leadership, personnel development, financial resources, school profile development and accountability);
- teaching and learning (e.g. curriculum development, performance evaluation, advisory and support services, school community involvement);
- outcomes and results (e.g. stakeholders satisfaction, educational pathways and competences).

As many countries are still in the process of carrying out their first round of external evaluation, it is too early to measure the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on student outcomes. However, first indications point to a reduction in early school leavers ([3]), increased student motivation ([4]) and satisfaction, and more efficient use of financial resources.

4.2. Self-assessment

It is a common belief of study visits participants that quality assurance in education and vocational training requires a bottom-up approach; it should be primarily the responsibility of the schools and VET institutions and requires the involvement of the whole school community. This would place self-assessment at the heart of the process of quality improvement in schools and training institutions. Self-assessment is a systematic and regular review of systems, programmes, processes, activities, results and outputs that helps identify strengths and weaknesses in schools and VET institutions (Kelly, 2010). Such regular monitoring and review contributes to continuous improvement of a school and training institution with the ultimate goal of increased student achievement.

In some countries (e.g. EE, SE) self-assessment has become mandatory and in others (e.g. PT, RO) approaches have been developed where national guidelines have been made available. In most cases, schools and training institutions are allowed to design their own framework and apply their own criteria for self-assessment;

([3]) A study visit participant who works as a policy advisor in the department of education and quality assurance in the ROC Friesland College, a vocational institute in the Netherlands, reported that quality improvement efforts following external evaluation and self-assessment results within the institute led to reduction in the number of early school leavers.

([4]) At the G9 vocational school in Hamburg, school evaluation and associated quality improvement efforts have led to increased motivation of students as they felt they are taken more seriously than before, being able to play an active part in school development.

a comprehensive self-assessment framework with common criteria being applied across a country is rarely seen. Self-assessment approaches are mostly based on the EFQM excellence model ([5]), Common assessment framework ([6]) or ISO 9001:2000 ([7]) quality assurance models. Self-assessment tends to evaluate elements such as leadership and management, teaching and learning, support for students, school environment, and professional development opportunities for staff.

([5]) EFQM Excellence model: Available from Internet: http://www.efqm.org/en/tabid/108/default.aspx .
([6]) Common assessment. framework. Available from Internet: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/caf/a0068957/the-caf-process .
([7]) ISO 9001:2000 for education sector. Available from Internet: http://www.iso.org/iso/pressrelease.htm?refid=Ref889 .

5. Key messages for policy and decision-makers

The following key messages relate to important principles essential to a culture of continuous improvement in schools and VET institutions. They support external evaluation and self-assessment and building trust between stakeholders to ensure the quality of education and training provision.

5.1. Place evaluation in a continuous cyclical process of quality improvement

Evaluation, either external or internal, should be seen as part of a cyclical process: from planning, through doing, through checking, to acting (Deming's wheel of Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle) and over again. It is a fundamental principle of introducing change and improvement in schools and training institutions.

Figure 2. **Deming's wheel of PDCA cycle**
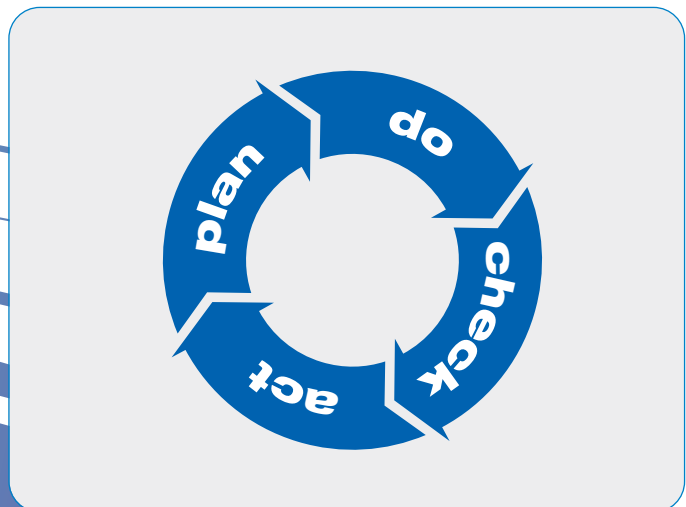
In Catalonia, for example, the Ministry of Education has set up a process of quality assurance and excellence for VET schools called 'E2CAT'([8]) (Cedefop, 2010b). In this, 150 training providers participate voluntarily in a plan for quality and continuous improvement using a combination of ISO 9000 and EFQM model to reach 'quality excellence'.

In Hamburg and Saxony, schools are expected to sign an agreement with their ministry interlocutor about the three key areas which they wish to improve, following up the results of their external evaluation.

5.2. Ensure cooperation between education and training providers, responsible authorities and decision-makers

Quality assurance systems are often seen as imposed top down rather than as 'shared'. External evaluation can only be successful as a shared responsibility, based on a solid partnership among all stakeholders, from schools and VET institutions to policy-makers. Responsible local and regional authorities can work as mediators between education and training providers and policy-makers. For example, local authorities in the city of Stavanger in Norway assess the performance of schools and work with them to identify measures for quality improvement. Local politicians participate in school boards and are involved in designing action plans for schools with head teachers. This way policy-makers gain first-hand information on the schools and better understanding of their needs.

([8]) Quality assurance in VET in Catalonia, Josep Camps Generalitat de Catalunya. Available from Internet: http://studyvisits.cedefop.eu.int/assets/upload/supervisors/seminars/2011_Workshop_PPTCamps.pdf .

Example 3. **External evaluation activity to support schools as learning organisations: the city of Stavanger, Norway**

Every two to four years all local schools in Stavanger receive a report from the local authority about their performance. The report is based on results from national tests, parent and pupil surveys and self-assessment, and is prepared with the help of the strategic management tool 'balanced scorecard'. It is written by one of the advisers from the local authority who has a dual role of assessing the performance of schools and working with the school community to identify measures for quality improvement.

Two months after the school has received the report, advisers from the local authority, representatives of school management, parents and pupils meet to agree on an action plan based on mutual understanding of the areas that the school needs to improve. This meeting is seen as central to the quality management of the city's education and training system; dialogue is based on collaboration rather than as a top-down intervention.

For further information please contact Rune Knutsen, Advisor, Stavanger kommune, http://www.stavanger.kommune.no/ .

5.3. Participation leads to greater acceptance and ownership of evaluation results

Education and training providers should be given the opportunity to participate in the external evaluation of their institutions. This will increase evaluation transparency and criteria used, will promote trust, and lead to greater acceptance of the evaluation results. For example, during external evaluation in Catalonia and Saxony, schools and training institutions can propose areas for improvement and action: they agree on targets with the responsible local authorities. In Stavanger, Norway, schools comment on the draft external evaluation report and the final report includes their remarks.

5.4. External evaluation should praise the strengths

External evaluation should identify good practices and praise achievements, not just concentrate on weaknesses. This positive approach contributes to removing resistance to external evaluation and to developing a culture where education and training institutions benefit from one another's work. In Lithuania, for example, the national agency for school evaluation identifies five areas for improvement and ten examples of good practice in each school. Positive examples are included in a publication and disseminated to all schools so that others learn from them and improve their own management and teaching practices.

Example 4. **Using external evaluation results to celebrate success in Lithuania**

During the external evaluation of schools, the National agency for school evaluation collects examples of good teaching and management. A DVD entitled 'Find success', produced in 2010, contains examples of good practice from eight schools, showing how management of schools influences teaching, learning and student achievements. The results of external evaluation are used to celebrate success, are disseminated in schools and allow head teachers and teachers to learn from one another and transfer good practices to their schools.

For further information please contact Vida Kamenskiene, Head of Division, National agency for school evaluation, http://www.nmva.smm.lt/ltl/ .

5.5. Ensure external evaluation and self-assessment are a continuum

External evaluation and self assessment must be seen as complementary parts of one process aimed at improving quality in schools and training institutions. They do not necessarily have to use the same quality standards and criteria but they can inform each other and allow for follow-up actions. In some cases, external evaluators step back if a robust, transparent and efficient system of self-assessment is in place. In the Netherlands, for example, external evaluation relies on self-assessment that 11 secondary schools, forming an association called Semper Movens ([9]) (Cedefop, 2010a), have set up in the past five years. There is no external evaluation of these schools.

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[9] See presentation by Thijs Veraart, Headmaster of Sint-Maartenscollege. Available from Internet: http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/assets/upload/supervisors/ seminars/ 2011_Workshop_PPTHendriks.pdf .

Study visit participants expressed the view that the role of external evaluation would change, or need for it diminish, as a culture of self-assessment emerges in a country. Finland was mentioned as an example: the national school inspection system was abolished about 15 years ago and now nearly all schools undertake self-assessment, even though they are not legally obliged to do so.

5.6. Self-assessment needs universal support

Leadership is critical to developing a culture of evaluation in schools and training institutions. Good leaders are key agents of change: they formulate a vision, communicate it clearly to the whole school community, believe in and are committed to self-assessment, and set the example for it. The Max-Eyth vocational school in Hessen ([10]), Germany is an interesting example of good practice in securing the support of school staff in self-assessment. The headmistress of the school decided to 'set the example' of building up a culture of self-assessment in her school. She asked her staff to evaluate her performance after one year in the post and acted on selected points for improvement. She has used this method to 'sell' the concept of self-assessment to other members of the school community and help them associate self-assessment with something good for school development. In the coming years the headmistress plans, first, to introduce teachers evaluation and, later, extend this to the whole school.

While leaders are key figures in initiating change, self-assessment should not be carried out by the head teacher or a self-assessment team in isolation. Self-evaluation will be successful only if the whole school community ([11]) understands and embraces the process, contributes to it, is aware of the results, participates in decision-making

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([10]) Internal and external quality management for vocational schools in Germany, Claudia Galetzka, Headmistress, Max-Eyth-Schule.
Available from Internet: http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/assets/upload/supervisors/seminars/2011_Workshop_PPTGaletzka.pdf [cited 22.8.2011].

([11]) School community refers to all individuals involved in school life, including head teachers, deputy teachers, members of the governing board, teachers, counsellors, all non-pedagogical school staff, pupils/students, parents, members of the local community, etc.

and takes corrective measures for any improvements to be made. For example, in Asturias (Spain), parents and teachers get involved in designing questionnaires for self-assessment and take part in surveys, focus groups, observations and interviews (Cedefop, 2011b).

Example 5. **Participatory approach to self-assessment in the Winterhude Reform School (Gesamtschule Winterhude) in Hamburg**

The Winterhude Reform School is in Hamburg and has around one thousand pupils aged between five and twenty.

The head teacher of the school has developed an innovative system of 'school improvement', which is based on continuous self-assessment. School improvement starts with meetings between pupil and parent councils; any new idea or a development plan is first discussed in these forums. Parents' involvement is strengthened by a 'contract' that parents sign when their child enters the school, agreeing to attend the school meetings. After each meeting, everyone completes a feedback questionnaire about the topic raised in the meeting. New activities are evaluated after one year and then less often; evaluations primarily use questionnaires as the main research methodology although observations and other methods are also used. For example, PhD students from pedagogical departments of universities visit the school and observe activities for six months before writing an evaluation report. The school contracts an educational institute to test students at school year 3, 6 and 8 in German, English and maths to monitor their progress.

Also, at regular intervals external experts are invited to the school to lecture to staff and parents to raise their awareness of the importance of improving quality. These lectures may be on issues such as school improvement, new pedagogies or any other aspect of school life.

For further information, please contact Martin Heusler, Principal, GS Winterhude. Available from Internet: *http://www.sts-winterhude.de/ .*

5.7. Schools learn self-assessment from each other

Cooperation between schools and training institutions, and exchange of examples of good management and teaching practice, help promote self-assessment. Joint work on monitoring and reviewing the quality of their education and training and learning from one another help institutions to set up internal systems of quality improvement. For example, in Lithuania, 33 schools took responsibility for their own learning and development and produced *Recommendations for school self-assessment*, a manual to help individual schools to create their own systems of self-assessment. Local authorities should, whenever possible, support the creation of such networks (see Example 6).

Example 6. **Local authority support to schools to promote self-assessment: Prienai municipality, Lithuania**

The Prienai municipality runs a club on self-assessment (known as CSE in Lithuania). It is aimed at those individuals in schools and training institutions who are interested in self-assessment processes and methodologies, including data collection, writing a self-assessment report and using findings from self-assessment. The club also seeks to increase awareness about the relationship between self-assessment and school planning. Practical ways of integrating self-assessment into school improvement plans are discussed, together with motivational techniques for teachers on the importance of evaluation.

Formal and non-formal meetings and study visits are organised by the club for school representatives. During such meetings, schools are encouraged to share their experiences, both successful and unsuccessful. The club is also involved in national and international projects which address evaluation, to ensure a constant

flow of new ideas and information on new evaluation practices and methods. At the end of each year the activities and results are presented to head teachers in the region.

The CSE club, and other activities which take place within the municipality, have had a positive impact on the culture of evaluation in the region as all local general education schools now have a system of self-assessment in place.

For further information please contact Renata Pavlavičienė, Expert, Prienai municipality. Available from Internet: www.prienai.lt .

The practice known as 'critical friends' is often used by schools to help each other carry out self-assessment. Representatives from other schools and VET institutions visit a school for a couple of days to observe lessons, talk to parents, pupils, teachers and other school staff and report on their observations, providing also advice and recommendations on areas which need to be developed.

Example 7. **A collaborative system of common visits for quality improvement: Semper Movens association, the Netherlands**

Semper Movens, an association of secondary schools in the Netherlands developed a collaborative system of common visits for quality improvement: this model of self-evaluation supports exchange of opinion and good practice among schools.

Each school in the association is evaluated by a team of 5-6 partner schools representatives. All members have been trained to carry out the evaluation and they examine three components: one strong area of the school, one area that is under development and one

area that the school needs to improve. The areas are chosen by the schools themselves and can include, for example, an assessment of the school's guidance and counselling provisions, a study subject, or school safety. The evaluation team uses document review, lesson observations and discussions with the members of the school community (management, teachers, students and parents) as evidence for their assessment and making recommendations.

This approach reduces resistance to external evaluation and increases the motivation of teachers and students, who are actively involved in school management.

For further information please contact Thijs Veraart Headmaster Sint-Maartenscolleg. Available from Internet: http://www.sint-maartenscollege.nl/.

5.8. Quality improvement requires empowered schools

Schools and training institutions need to build capacity to develop a continuous improvement process. Many need support, as they lack the expertise and resources to set up and carry out self-assessment.

Initial and in-service teacher training can improve teachers' understanding of the process and the benefits of school external evaluation and self-assessment. Head teachers should be trained in how to work with evaluation reports and how to set up self-assessment processes in their schools. In Austria, for example, the Pädagogischen Institut, an in-service training institution, provides compulsory courses in self-assessment to all head teachers.

Self-assessment models and indicators, online questionnaires and analysis tools can be provided, as well as direct support in carrying out self-assessment. Romania has developed a national framework

for self-assessment which contains a description of the objectives and principles of evaluation, performance indicators and advice on organisational arrangements (Cedefop, 2011c).

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education funded the development of a software package called SETAQ Builder, which schools can use to create and modify their own tools for self-assessment and reporting.

In Flanders, Belgium, an external advisor from the pedagogical advisory service of the Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education carries out school 'self-assessment' and advises on its strengths and weaknesses (Example 8).

Example 8. **The role of pedagogical advisers in self-assessment of schools in Flanders, Belgium**

Pedagogical advisers play a key role in self-assessment in Flanders. If a school asks for help with quality improvement, an adviser carries out a self-assessment on behalf of the school.

The advisor will start the process by gathering data about the school through questionnaires and focus groups. The advisor will use a template for the questionnaire, to which each school can add up to 20 of its own questions. The adviser then writes a report for the school which outlines the results of the research and identifies the school's main strengths and weaknesses. This data is then used by the school to choose its own priorities and targets and design activities aimed at school improvement.

For further information please contact Luk Van Canneyt, Educational Consultan, Diocesan Schools Advisory Service, Bruges. Available from Internet: http://www.dpbbrugge.be/ .

5.9. External evaluators need to be well trained

External evaluators should possess appropriate knowledge, skills and competences and go through rigorous recruitment and training. For example, in Lithuania experienced teachers go through a long recruitment process involving interviews, team assignments, observations and written assignments before undertaking 120 hours of training, consisting of practical and classroom based assignments, to become external evaluators.

6. European work on quality as a point of reference

European cooperation plays a crucial role in promoting better education and training and providing Member States with common tools for their quality management practices. For example, the European quality assurance reference framework includes quality criteria and indicative descriptors to guide both Member States and VET providers who wish to set up an evaluation framework in initial and continuous vocational training. The quality criteria refer to planning on the basis of a strategic vision, to implementation of plans defined with the participation of stakeholders, to regular evaluation of the outcomes of learning and teaching and of their processes, including their measurement, and to their review for action plans for change to be put in place (Example 9).

Cedefop has produced the *European guide on self-assessment for VET providers*. This is a practical tool that has stimulated developments in national quality frameworks, having been translated, adapted and tested in Member States such as Bulgaria, Romania and Italy. The guide follows the everyday activities of a VET provider; it is based on questions and answers, and covers both the training and the support (non-training) processes of VET institutions. It proposes two frameworks for self-assessment, one with a questionnaire and the other with a check-list. Although it focuses principally on VET providers, the guide also proposes a framework for self-assessment at system level (Cedefop, 2003).

Example 9. **Extract from the European quality assurance reference framework: quality criteria and indicative descriptors for evaluation of outcomes and processes at VET provider level**

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement.	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers.
	Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education, including the assessment of learner satisfaction and staff performance and satisfaction.
	Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders.
	Early warning systems are implemented.

7. By way of conclusion

Study visits demonstrate the recent developments that are taking place in most Member States to ensure quality in education and vocational training. This publication, based on study visit results, is not meant to describe a unique system of evaluation of schools and training institutions. Such a system does not exist, as countries need to use different and sometimes complex quality assurance mechanisms which are closely linked to their social, economic and political context. Policy and decision-makers are invited to decide which of the recommendations presented in this publication fit best in their country's context and what can be applied to develop a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement in schools and training institutions. The study visits programme will continue, until the end of its current mandate in 2013, to identify practical examples of good practice and inform policy and decision-makers in their efforts to improve the quality of education and training provision in Europe.

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CEDEFOP
European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Evaluation for improving student outcomes

Messages for quality assurance policies

Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

Evaluation for improving student outcomes

Messages for quality assurance policies

Improving the quality of European education and training systems is one of the pillars of Europe's strategy to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy by 2020.

This publication aims to provide policy and decision-makers with recommendations to help them develop a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement in schools and training institutions in Europe. It highlights a number of key messages to promote external evaluation and self-assessment and ensure the quality of education and training provision.

Recommendations in this publication are based on discussions in two peer learning study visits for high level policy- and decision-makers, organised in Vilnius and Hamburg in 2010, and a Cedefop organised workshop, in Bonn in February 2011, on improving quality in schools and VET institutions.

The study visits programme organises approximately 20 visits each year, allowing decision-makers and practitioners to identify examples of good practice and explore issues related to quality in education and vocational training with their peers from other European countries.

GO SEE UNDERSTAND

The study visits programme for education and vocational training specialists and decision-makers, part of the lifelong learning programme (2007-13), is an initiative of the European Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Cedefop coordinates the programme at the European level, whereas the national agencies implement the programme in the participating countries.

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