



ANALYSIS OF RELATION BETWEEN THE QA-LEAD PROJECT AND INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS

Condensed version

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Abbreviations

AQT	Apprenticeship Quality Tool
BuildPHE	BuildPHE Excellence Framework: Guidelines, Methodology and Tool for Self-reflection on Achievement of Institutions or Programmes of Professional Higher Education
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
IQA	Institutional Quality Assurance
HVET	Higher Vocational Education and Training
ISO	International Organisation for Standardization
PDCA	Plan – Do – Check -Act
PHE	Professional Higher Education
PHEI	Professional Higher Education Institution
QA	Quality Assurance
SMART	Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant - Time-Bound
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
VET	Vocational Higher Education

Introduction

Often top management staff of Professional Higher Education Institutions, while having significant expertise as to what constitutes quality education, will have never received any formal training in Quality Management and limited expertise in how to translate their mission and vision into a well-functioning Quality Assurance system. Therefore, despite efforts to the contrary, often quality assurance is reduced to a 'commitment to quality culture' supported by a bureaucratic and time-consuming set of checks.

The QA-Lead project aimed to address this gap by developing training & resources specifically tailored to supporting institutional leaders in their strategic role towards Quality Assurance.

Despite the various European and International Recognition Tools used to support and evaluate quality in education and training, until recently, no proposal existed on how European Higher Vocational Institutions could implement a comprehensive quality management system within professional higher education institutions.

The intention is therefore describing the relation and applicability to achieving the requirements of each of the following quality schemes:

- *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*
- *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Area (ESG)*
- *ISO Management System for Educational Organizations – Requirements and Guidance for Use (ISO 21001)*
- *BuildPHE Excellence Framework: Guidelines, Methodology and Tool for Self-reflection on Achievement of Institutions or Programmes of Professional Higher Education (BuildPHE)*
- *Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit (AQT)*

1 QA-Lead and Recognition Tools

1.1 European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)

1.1.1 About EQAVET

EQAVET – the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training is a community of practice that promotes European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET. It brings together the EU Member States, the Social Partners, and the European Commission to develop and improve quality assurance in European VET systems within the context of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. The community leads to higher levels of cooperation and synergy within and across EU Member States on quality assurance related issues (EQAVET 2020).

1.1.2 EQAVET relation with the QA-Lead project

EQAVET mostly complements the management indicators and resources developed in the QA-Lead project. For both tools, monitoring of all processes is an integral and fundamental part. One of the key factors in quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) assumed by EQAVET is the involvement of internal and external stakeholders. Other fundamental component of the EQAVET Framework is the PDCA cycle of quality management, based on the Deming cycle. However, without the definition of SMART objectives in the planning phase, the entire cycle fails, what makes EQAVET implementation impossible. In addition to be a legal requirement, the evaluation of all processes is also an integral part of EQAVET. In the EQAVET process, there is no point where data protection and complaints and appeals are addressed, they are implicit in the entire (quality) process of QA-Lead.

1.2 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Area (ESG)

1.2.1 About ESG

The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are the basis for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). “The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation. The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the European Higher Education Area regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. It also provides the criteria at European level against which quality assurance agencies and their activities are assessed.” (ibid., 7).

1.2.2 ESG relation with the QA-Lead project

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) is primarily dedicated to overall quality in higher education, including but not specifically tailored to professional higher education. It has also shallow link to the labour market. ESG is generally in line with the QA-Lead outputs. The importance of well-designed learning outcomes is covered in ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes. ESG 1.2 focuses on SMART learning objectives, which have been leading in most of the QA-Lead outputs, although the ESG is not so explicit in the definition of the objectives.

The ESG does not explicitly include reference to data protection, which is an important concern for the QA-Lead approach to institutional management. However, as a general approach, information management is covered by ESG 1.7 Information management. There is large compliance with ESG 1.1 which focuses on the policy for quality assurance.

1.3 ISO Management System for Educational Organizations – Requirements and Guidance for Use (ISO 21001)

1.3.1 About ISO 21001

ISO 21001 “Educational organizations – Management systems for educational organizations – Requirements and guidance for use”, was published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on May 1, 2018, and is the first ISO management system standard specifically developed for educational organizations.

This ISO project, which took four years to be developed with the participation of over 100 countries, was created to fulfil a gap in the market, identified by ISO 9001 users in the education sector. These users, responsible for *circa* twenty thousand ISO 9001 accredited certifications worldwide (ISO, 2012, 2013b, 2014), raised concerns related to the difficulties in translating ISO 9001 requirements into the educational context, due to the specificities and complexities of the sector. The ISO Central Secretariat was sensible to these concerns and in September 2013, through Resolution #101 (ISO, 2013), merged three different ongoing standardization projects in education (IWA 2/ISO 18420 for formal education, ISO 29990 for vocational training and ISO 36001 for e-learning) into one mega project that would become ISO 21001.

ISO 21001 provides a common management tool for organizations providing educational products and services capable of meeting the needs and requirements of learners and other customers (ISO 2018a). It is a stand-alone management system standard, aligned with other ISO management system standards (*ibid.*). ISO 21001 specifies requirements for a management system for educational organizations. All requirements of ISO 21001 are generic. They are intended to be applicable to any organization that uses a curriculum to support the development of competence through teaching, learning or research, regardless of the type, size, or method of delivery (ISO 2018b).

1.3.2 ISO 21001 relation with the QA-Lead project

Generally, ISO 21001 and the QA-Lead project address the same subjects, although the QA-Lead outputs have listed more specific expectations and specifically address top institutional management. ISO 21001 users can, therefore, use the QA-Lead resources to fine tune their practices related to top institutional management. However, there is an exception in what regards “Data Protection”, where ISO 21001 has much more prescriptive requirements than those developed for QA-Lead. Another difference lies in the use of terminology where QA-Lead sometimes uses different interpretations of terms, more in line with European frameworks and agreements (Bologna Process, ESG, EQAVET). This can cause confusion with ISO 21001 users where otherwise the QA-Lead outputs are mostly aligned with ISO 21001.

1.4 BuildPHE Excellence Framework: Guidelines, Methodology and Tool for Self-reflection on Achievement of Institutions or Programmes of Professional Higher Education (BuildPHE)

1.4.1 About BuildPHE

BuildPHE's main aim was to foster improved collaboration between PHEIs and enterprises, by increasing the quality of the 'professional' experiences on offer in the same institutions. This increases the choice of learning pathways available to students, in particular strengthening 'dual' options involving a mixture of studies and work experience such as apprenticeships. The institutional policies and strategies are defined in collaboration with the world of work.

The BuildPHE self-reflection framework consists of 12 criteria, each presented with accompanying questions, indicators and sub-criteria which can be used as building blocks for an internal quality assurance policy and/or self-assessment. The use of menus allows to explore the criteria with questions, indicators, and sub-criteria (BuildPHE 2018).

1.4.2 BuildPHE relation with the QA-Lead project

BuildPHE strongly complements the management indicators and resources developed in the QA-Lead project. There is a specifically strong link in the areas of policy and strategy integration, strategic objectives and outcomes, as well as monitoring quality. Furthermore, the alignment of both tools is high on purpose of quality culture and on setting quality culture objectives. Build PHE is focusing also on the research component and regional engagement. However, in the BuildPHE process, there is no point where data protection and complaints and appeals are addressed, they are implicit in the entire (quality) process of QA-Lead

1.5 Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit (AQT)

1.5.1 About AQT

The Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit follows a quality management system style approach. It works in a bi-directional way: outside-in, by organizing and controlling the apprenticeship related processes and communications of both organizations, which facilitate the employees' understanding of their roles, improving their performance, and making daily operations more efficient; and inside-out, by providing quality assurance to the students and other beneficiaries of the apprenticeships provided, bringing market trust and recognition for all parts.

The Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit was designed considering the need to control 8 critical processes at the PHEIs and SMEs (AQT 2017).

1.5.2 AQT relation with the QA-Lead project

Both tools are well aligned. In AQT the criteria on Setting the learning objectives of overall programme compliments the QA-Lead section on Learning objectives stated through involvement of all stakeholders. It also compliments the module on Setting quality assurance objectives. The AQT criteria on Identifying and recruiting Placements complements the module on Creating a quality culture since this is a priority on how to engage recruitment as there are several different ways in different countries but the toolkit assists with questions supporting in creating a quality culture in recruitment and capacity building support. The criterion on Negotiating the agreement also assists in creating a culture of negotiations and complements with regards the overall programme, and involvement of all stakeholders in creating such negotiations. The monitoring section with the ongoing monitoring module and data forms are strongly aligned. The assessment part of AQT is supported by the QA-Lead modules of Information Management and Feedback.

2 Conclusions

The QA-Lead Toolkit (and the outputs based on them) constitute new tools to plan, manage, assure, and evaluate the quality of internal institutional management within professional higher education institutions.

Consultations were held with top management staff and experts in the Czech Republic, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia. They performed a comparative analysis between the QA-Lead Toolkit and other European and International recognition tools (EQAVET, ESG, ISO 21001, BuildPHE, AQT). The results of the consultation, such as the identification of conflict and synergies between the tools and recommendations to improve harmonization, facilitate integration and boost adoption, were analysed, and discussed by the consortium. The consensus reached was subsequently reflected in:

- the *Internal Quality Assurance Manual for Institutional Leaders*;
- the *Competence Framework and Curriculum for Top-Level Internal Quality Assurance for Institutional Leaders*;
- the *List of Training Course Videos for IQA for Institutional Leaders*;
- the *Online Course for Institutional Leaders*;
- the *Toolkit for Institutional QA Implementation Strategies for Institutional Leaders*.

Taken globally, the opinion of the experts consulted in the analyses, to a low level of conflict, a high level of agreement and complementarity between the tools, to the advantages of using them together and improve even further their harmonization in the future.

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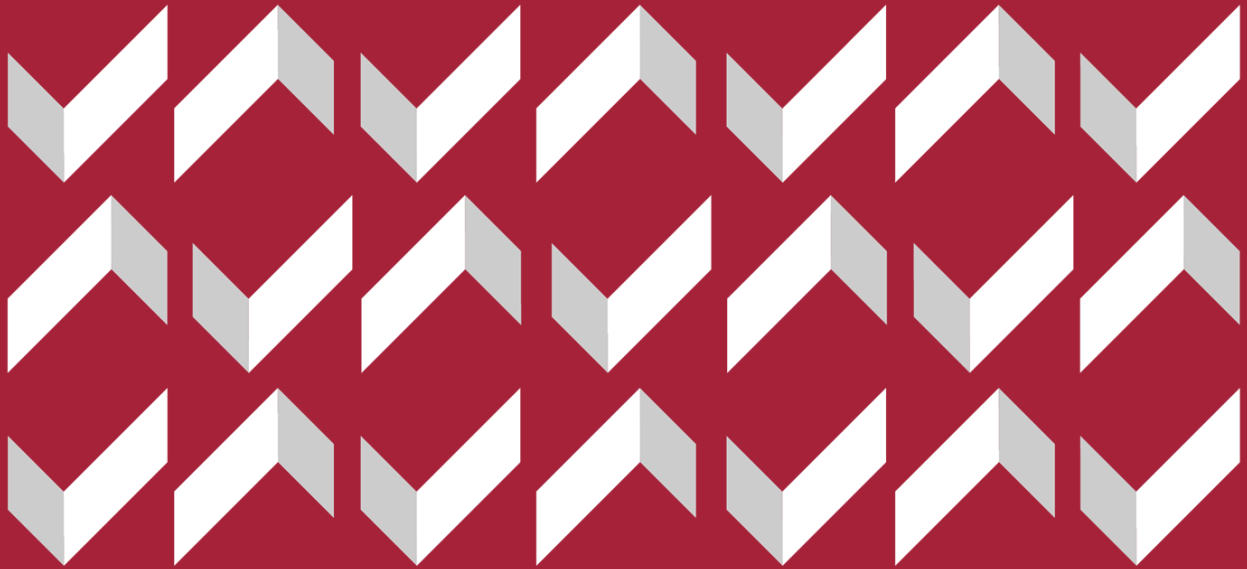
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About the QA Lead Project and this publication

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