O4 - THE OPENQASS TOOLKIT

Outcome 4 of the OpenQAsS project is the production of an open source software toolkit to support the management of QA systems in vocational schools and training providers. There are two obvious hurdles to be overcome before the Toolkit can be developed: (i) there is a need to be able to define 'quality' in the context of the jobs and responsibilities that teachers have, and (ii) there needs to be a specification for a toolkit that fits with practice and existing systems.
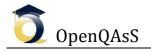
Initially the project focused on the exemplar Quality Manual (QM) brought by one the partners, plus the examples in the CEDEFOP Quality Handbook for VET Providers – now on the system portal in four languages. Today the project has a pilot implementation, which was demonstrated at Meeting 5 in Dublin, which will soon be piloted initially in Hungary. It is the practical result of some early experimentation coupled with the unequivocal outcome of the survey covered in Newsletter 3. That survey answered the "what are the practical quality processes that would help teachers?" question, where the top requirements were for: (i) a lesson planning tool, and (ii) a document repository. The Toolkit will therefore be developing explicit tools to support these activities, but internally it will be based on a 'micro' toolkit that can be used to develop similarly structured tools as well as offering great flexibility to adapt the reference Lesson Planning tool for any specific institutional variations. It will also be linked to a Document Repository that will enable teachers to include any relevant supporting materials, much of which may represent valuable background experience that could otherwise be lost.

Any toolkit has to be developed in a specific system. In this case the project has gone with the open source PHP-based Drupal CMS (content management system), which is accessible, widely used, and extremely flexible. It is backed up by a MySQL database, which again is open, widely used and capable of being used as a 'linked server' to institutional databases such as SQL Server.

The Toolkit will take the form of an add-on 'App' installable within a standard Drupal 7 framework.

This Drupal 'App' is capable of being used by non-IT specialists, though it does require them to have confidence is the use of CMS systems. This is a commonly found skill today, and one that might reasonably be expected to be found within a VET institution. It automatically creates the required database structures to capture the data from the Toolkit's screens and forms, thereby relieving institutions of the need to be able to develop at this level. It is a goal of the OpenQAsS project to develop a 'quality' community, which will greatly enhance the potential use and adaptation of the initial Toolkit. Once piloted, it is hoped that the approach, the underlying micro-toolkit, and the flexibility of the implementation will encourage much wider use and development to include a range of quality management processes specific to an institution. In

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this way, the Toolkit can be seen as an IT-based enabler of an ever growing range of quality processes and requirements.

It is essential that the Lesson Planner and the Document Repository are seen not as a prescriptive tool and approach but as an approach – backed up by tools – directly addressing quality management issues. The OpenQAsS IQAM course (which will be developed as Outcome 5) will orient and guide teachers and administrators in the use and application of the Toolkit.

Prior to the prototyping in Drupal the project looked at a purely standards-based approach to the possible implementation of a Quality Manual (using the CEDEFOP Handbook as an example). This was explored in the then absence of the survey results that homed in on Lesson Planner as the key value-add process to target. However there is a commonality across the micro-requirements of Lesson Planner and the various examples in the CEDEFOP Handbook. Most requirements need forms elements of various types, aggregated to design an overall set of forms. This initial experiment defined a very simple XML vocabulary that could be used to insert form elements requirements into any web page. The assumption was that many QMs might exist on institutional web site, and therefore could be readily enabled in situ, rather than develop a standalone toolkit. Background scripting could then auto-generate the interactive pages, linking all elements to a background database.
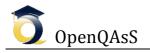
While of great interest, this idealistic approach was subsequently replaced with the much more practical Drupal-based approach to developing an open, flexible toolkit with its initial focus on Lesson Planning. This is by no means limiting, though there always has to be a choice of tools, and it does offer flexibility and adaptability for a self-supporting community. It also meets the requirements that were expressed very clearly by headmasters interviewed in the first phase of the project:

• The Toolkit must support Modular Design.
• A User-centred Design is essential ensure adoption of the methodology, the tool and the approach.
• The Toolkit must be supported by Exemplary IT-based solutions, hence the focus on Lesson Planning.
• The Toolkit and its implementations should not increase the administrative workload of the teachers. This is crucial, otherwise there is no real prospect of it being adopted.

The Lesson Planning Toolkit may not be appropriate for the retro-planning of established courses, so it will be targeted at new course developments. This may imply that the target user will be a more junior teacher saddled with the responsibility of developing lesson plans for a new or revised course, and establishing a repository of learning materials and other supporting content. This probably means that the Toolkit may not necessarily be used by the senior staff and management of an institution, so it is vital that it is willingly adopted by doing an valued job and being easy to use so that it is seen at decision-making levels.

The future goals of the project include identifying 10 institutions across the partner countries in which to test and evaluate the Toolkit. Pilots will start during April and May 2017, and will be available in four languages.

Open Source Quality Assurance System for Vocational Education

The OpenQAsS project vision is to utilise the potential of today's networking technology in all areas of the implementation of the EQAVET Reference Framework principles, and so make the resulting tools part of the daily practice of institutional Quality Assurance in our VET schools.

Target groups

- Teachers and headmasters of VET schools; managers and trainers of VET provider companies;
- VET schools and VET providers;
- Researchers working in the field of the vocational education;
- Software developers joining the OpenQAsS.org community.

Objectives

- To improve the culture of quality assurance by involvement of VET teachers and trainers into online consultation in the partner countries;
- To develop Open Source Software toolkit (OpenQAsS) to promote and facilitate QA management in VET schools and adult educational VET providers;
- To develop a certificate – Institutional Quality Assurance Manager (IQAM) – for VET teachers and trainers who take responsibility for quality management tasks in institutions.

Programme: Erasmus+, Strategic Partnership, Vocational Education and Training

Participating countries: Hungary, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Ireland

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Project website:
http://OpenQAsS.itstudy.hu/en

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