

NEWSLETTER

Published by: CAPDM Ltd., UK
Editor: Ken Currie

6. ISSUE

August 2017
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06 - AN INTERACTIVE QUALITY MANUAL

EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) aims are to develop and improve quality assurance in European VET systems within the context of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. EQAVET is designed to spread a quality culture in VET institutes, claimed as an essential condition for such improvement. However suggested problem areas include:

- the lack of a quality culture
- the reluctance of staff
- the lack of human resources.

Systems and IT support for quality are also part of the overall problem, and the lack of take-up of systems affects the development of a quality culture and staff interest. Pre-project analysis showed that in general there are at best partial solutions for quality support, but no obvious evidence of comprehensive systems being used in any member state. A key Outcome of OpenQAsS, therefore, was the development of an open source Quality Assurance (QA) Toolkit; with a common core that includes the EQAVET Reference Framework focal points and indicators.

As reported in Newsletter 3, and following findings from Outcome 2, the priorities of teachers ranked "Planning of learning activities" at the top of their list, hence OpenQAsS's focus on Lesson Planning as a key component of QA. However, while the teacher may focus on the student (teaching & assessment, retention & achievement, etc.), the institutional focus is more likely to be on: lecturer-student interactions and reporting; consistency of assessment decision making; institutional staff performance; external reporting to external QA systems; financial and estate management; and all other internal QA systems and management. These are at the heart of a Quality Manual (QM).

A QM compliant with the Scottish Quality Management System, and designed for use by vocational education and training organisations in Scotland, was available to the project as a meaningful testing ground for an eventual OpenQAsS Toolkit. However, this was supplanted by the CEDEFOP *Handbook for VET Providers*¹ that also provides an holistic institutional view, contains a very varied exemplars of processes and forms that support typical internal quality management needs, and represents the needs of a quality culture. This became the project focus.

Implementing the CEDEFOP Handbook

The CEDEFOP Handbook has been implemented in different ways and for different needs:

¹ *Handbook for VET providers: Supporting internal quality management and quality culture*. Cedefop Reference series 99, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015. ISSN: 2363-216X

We wish to thank Cedefop for granting permission to the OpenQAsS Consortium to translate this Handbook into Hungarian, Italian & Spanish, and for it to be used as a basis for developing the online IQAM course and toolkit.

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- Freely available on the Project's Drupal platform – openly available and with an EQAVET oriented QA Glossary and available in four languages (EN, HU, IT, ES)
- In Moodle as part of the IQAM course – also available in four languages (EN, HU, IT, ES)
- In Moodle, but as an example of a possible interactive, online QM – EN language only.

The IQAM course implementation is highly interactive. It allows users to make personal lesson notes and it incorporates lesson quizzes based on the Handbook content. These quizzes form the basis of the overall IQAM examination. The Handbook itself forms the core theory for the IQAM course, but augmented by course notes and assessments.

The exemplar interactive online QM on Moodle was mastered in DocBook XML (so held outside of the learning platform) and delivered into Moodle. A subset of the Appendices, which contain a fairly holistic set of exemplar interactive forms, were implemented as fully functional interactive QM pages backed up into an underlying database via a REST interface. These Appendices cover all the form-based functional features that are contained in the working Quality Manual brought to the project. The visibility and openness of the CEDEFOP Handbook made it a better choice.

As with the development of the Lesson Planner, the interactive QM was developed via a 'micro toolkit', rather than attempting to develop a full QM system. It is not possible to provide an open systems-based, extensible toolkit capable of being used, adapted, copied, etc. by any VET School that wants to adopt an ICT supported approach for their QA. There is no single toolkit available off-the-shelf for this purpose, not least because there is no single purpose that cuts across all member states and school needs within any state. There is also the fact that schools will use a very wide variety of ICT tools and systems, all of which are potentially subject to regular change.

There is one factor that probably will be common to all ICT supported implementations, however – they will be web based, though the interactivity required (e.g. forms) will be supported by different databases and related technologies. An open toolkit should therefore focus on standards and methodology, rather than particular tools.

This is a crucial concept to understand. Colleges may have a portal built on Drupal or Joomla, or Moodle widely, or develop in Oracle, ASP, etc. The common feature is that all end up delivering web-based interfaces (in HTML). The 41 QA 'tools' in the CEDAFOP Handbook are a set of structured forms with various data input features including text boxes, multi-choice statements, Likert Scale ratings, etc. The implementation of these tools forms a perfect exemplar of the potential application of a toolkit, and of the approach taken within.

OpenQAsS provides micro-toolkits able to build large, complete and very specific tools, such as a Lesson Planner and a QM. This approach is akin to providing a tub of Lego© bricks from which to build specific structures, but able to be restructured when needs change.

VET institutions need usable tools to develop their leadership and quality culture, to enhance their delivery of learning and services to support learning, to improve outcomes and impact, and to develop a capacity to improve. From a VET institution Governing Board, or an Educational Authority, perspective there are new challenges (e.g. benchmarking and collecting external feedback), ongoing challenges (e.g. self-evaluation and continuous quality improvement), and the need to encourage innovative approaches to learning, delivery of services and assessment.

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QA processes are central to this, and OpenQAsS offers small but effective steps towards this need for overall improvement.

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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.

Partners

capdm



TREBAG



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

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

Project duration: September 2014 – August 2017

Project ID: 2014-1-HU01-KA242-002356

Project website:

<http://OpenQAsS.itstudy.hu/en>

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