



## **TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON QUALITY IN VET**

### **A European Common Quality Assurance Framework**

Final Version

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## 1. Purpose

The work has resulted in the identification of a common core of criteria that are capable of promoting the development of quality in VET. This in turn led to a proposal, which if agreed by the Technical Working Group, could be adopted and tested at various levels on a voluntary basis.

The ultimate aim of this work is to arrive at a common reference framework on quality in VET. We tried to build a reference framework, allowing for different options in Member States, but still providing a common framework allowing for increasing transparency and consistency with each other's policy initiatives and actions in the field of quality assurance and enhancement. Building on the previous European Forum's work, and following the suggestion of the Technical Working Group (TWG) of 31 March 2003, it is possible to depict the complex work done on quality in VET in terms of the following interrelated steps:

- Purpose and plan
- Implementation
- Assessment and evaluation
- Feedback and procedures for change

Methodology can be seen as an additional horizontal step, which has to be decided on in each of the single steps and throughout the process.

The present work focuses on both the system and VET-provider levels. We have compiled a list of questions for each of the abovementioned steps. In answering those questions we should be able to enhance and assure quality in VET or at least to continue and focus the work done so far on quality. The questions are not context dependent, i.e. it is possible to ask the same questions at both levels, although the answers are expected to differ between the two levels.

The common core criteria for promoting quality in VET are criteria against which any policy or procedure can be measured for its expected effectiveness. The core criteria are therefore presented in a reference framework for quality in VET. This framework has a number of characteristics and contributes to the development of quality in VET on a number of areas:

- the framework builds on the collected experiences of the Member States;
- the framework provides an overview of the content of the different quality approaches;
- the framework identifies a small number of European common core criteria for the promotion of quality in VET;
- the European common core criteria in the framework are consistent with the main steps and questions of other main existing instruments, and in particular the EFQM and ISO;
- the framework only specifies the areas of provision which are considered crucial to quality programmes and does not prescribe how systems and providers are to operate;
- the framework tries cover all the major aspects of all existing practices and models;
- the framework can be used both at the system and VET-provider levels;
- the framework is capable of promoting the development of quality in VET.

All this taken together will, we hope, make the common reference framework a valuable tool for promoting the development of quality in VET both at European level and within the Member States.

Our working assumption is that a systematic approach is more productive than concentrating on the individual steps. Nevertheless it is very difficult to identify the causal link between a given quality approach and the quality achieved. There are many reasons for this. The main reason is the lack of clear measurement of output and outcome and thus no easy measurement of quality. On the input side, there are a number of different factors determining who and what is

responsible for the quality achieved. With a large number of complex and interrelated factors it seems almost impossible to isolate the effects of one single factor.

Another major difficulty is that generally very few Member States use the same quality system and core criteria at both system and provider levels. Most of the actors at system level are not applying a quality approach to themselves with the same enthusiasm as they display when they apply one to VET providers.

Moreover, there seems to be a common weak point in relation to feedback and procedures for change, which is the fourth step in the Quality Circle<sup>(1)</sup>. This step is essential in learning from the past and in making this learning active and transferable to new activities.

We hope that the reader can and will use our work to make progress within the area of quality in vocational education and training.

## 1.1 Background and definitions

To improve quality, countries need to share their experience of ‘creating systems’ so as to encourage good practice. It is our hope that our work will make a useful contribution to the never-ending ‘sharing of experience’ and ‘learning from experience’ between countries. In an area like vocational education and training every country, large or small, has something to contribute to the quality debate.

As we have already mentioned above, our work is intended to contribute to the construction of a common reference framework which:

- launches ideas and provokes discussion on policy action;
- brings out the fundamental questions;
- includes experiences from a number of Member States;
- is compatible with the other instruments, by identifying through a consensual and bottom-up approach, their main elements, and adding some new ones, in the perspective of a European approach;
- can be used both in initial and continuing training and in the public and private sectors.

This report aims at highlighting the key strategic decisions based on experiences from a number of Member States.

We are only too well aware that the term ‘quality’ means different things to different people.

Quality is context-dependent, i.e. without a concrete context it would be difficult (and meaningless) to define quality. But when you know the context, you can make the following broad definition of quality more specific:

### **Quality = fulfilment of goals**

One achieves quality when the activities fulfil the goals. This can be expressed in another way:

#### **Experience**

Quality = Expectation

To take any advantage of this definition we need a clear description of the context. This description has to include goals, experiences and expectations from a number of different actors. When we have a clear description of this context it is possible to talk about and work with these definitions of quality.

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<sup>(1)</sup> For details of the Quality Circle, see page 5.

*Quality approaches* are any integrated set of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools and verification instruments and mechanisms whose collective purpose is to ensure and enhance the quality provided by any VET institution.

The term ‘*approach*’ is used in this report as an overall term because the term ‘system’ is often used in a narrower sense. So the term ‘*approaches*’ is used to cover both very fixed and formalised real systems and any set of more systematic behaviour meant to regulate and/or develop the performance quality of a VET system.

## **1.2 An overview of the working process**

When we started our work in the European Forum (2001-02) our main focus was collecting data on how each of the Member States worked with quality. After a long period of collecting and analysing data and discussing the work done, we ended up with a ‘Quality Circle’ with the following steps or key issues:

- Purpose
- Definition of VET goals and standards
- Degree of complexity
- Implementation
- Assessment and evaluation
- Feedback mechanisms and procedures for change
- Key actors

This model was regarded as (at least) one of the main outcomes of the European Forum.

During the process, and especially after making the ‘Quality Circle’, a few fundamental questions were raised several times:

- What are the unit of analysis and the focus of our framework?
- What are the purposes of the framework?
- How can we use the framework?

Given the time pressure, our work so far has focused on trying to grasp the content of each of the steps in the model and no deep reflection took place on the above three questions. The changeover that took place in 2003 from the European Forum to the TWG on quality in VET, which brought with it a number of new participants, made these questions even more fundamental.

*What are the unit of analysis and the focus of our framework?*

From the outset of our work we decided that our main unit of analysis should be the different quality approaches in VET both within and across the Member States.

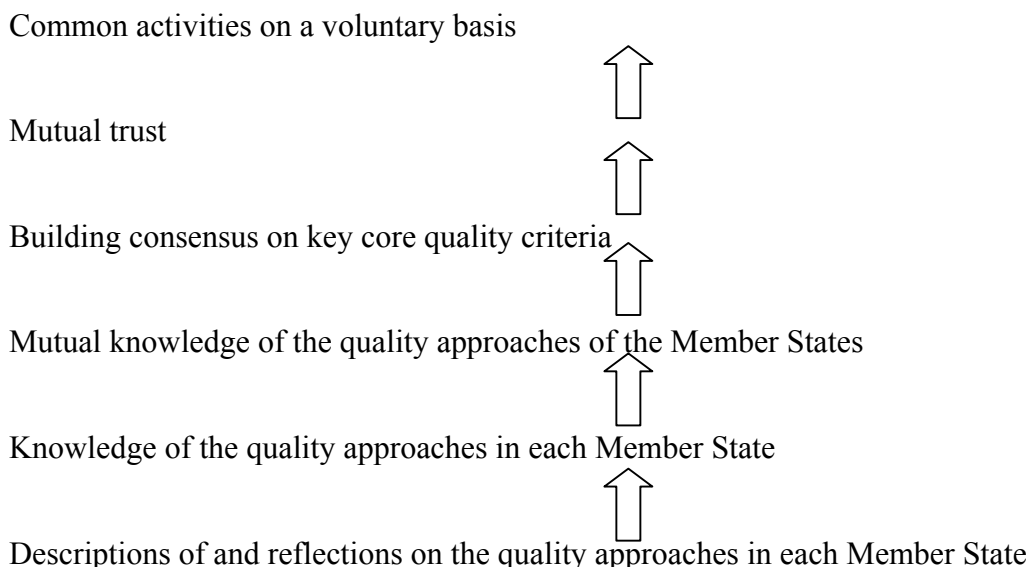
We are focusing on the factors that are important for quality in VET.

We are not focusing on calculating quality itself. With quality defined as the relationship between experience and expectation, quality will always be both subjective and context-dependent.

Even though we do not calculate quality, since our framework covers both experience and expectations, it still allows the different actors to perform the calculation.

*What are the purposes of the framework?*

The framework serves the same overall purpose as all the work of the European Forum and the TWG. The following model or taxonomy can help us understand the links between the different purposes and the different aspects of our work.



The basic assumption behind this model is that descriptions, discussion and knowledge can lead to mutual trust. This presupposes that each Member State needs to have a description of its own practices and has to reflect on them. You need to understand yourself before you try to understand other people and Member States.

If the main purpose and objective is to create – or at least foster - mutual trust, we have to look at our work with that aim in mind.

The following diagram provides an overview of the whole working process from the European Forum to the TWG on quality in VET in 2003.

**Figure 1. The working process**

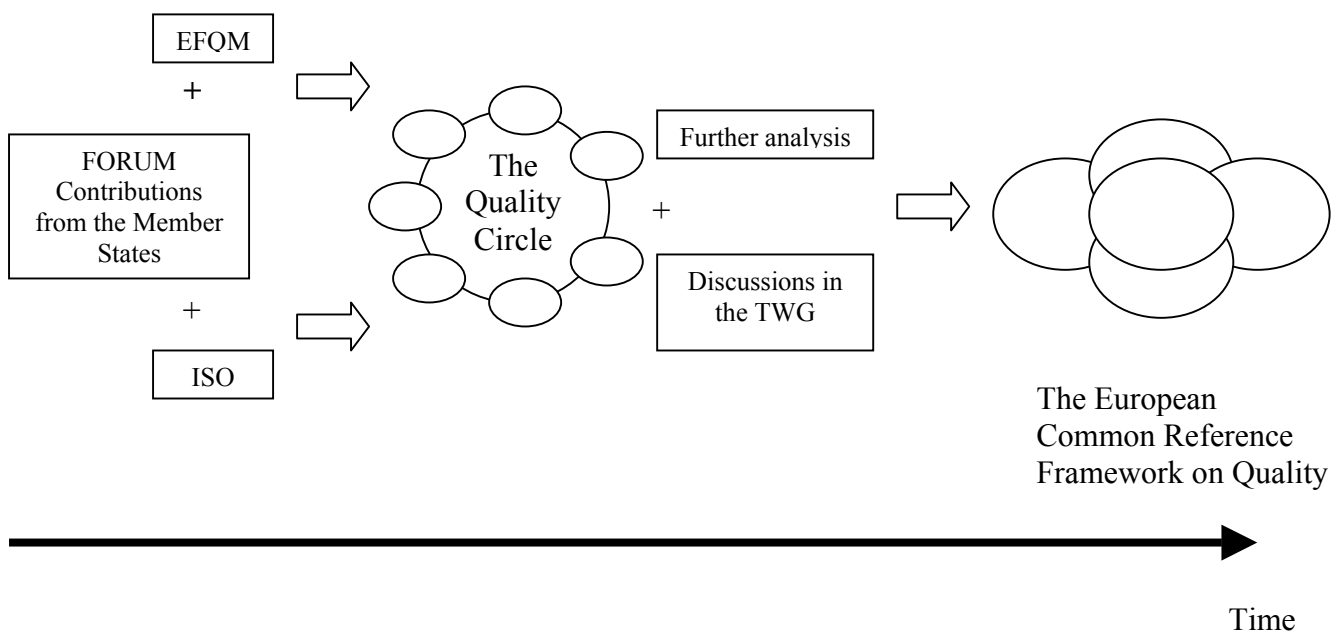


Figure 1 illustrates a process of reducing complexity, starting from a number of specific contributions from the Member States and two major quality management approaches: ISO and EFQM and ending with the European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET via the seven steps of the Quality Circle. But how simple or complex a framework do we need?

A framework can have a range of purposes: it can provide an overview of the key elements of quality in VET; it can be a reference framework, a checklist of the European common core criteria for quality in VET, an instrument to enhance quality in VET or, at the highest (or at least the most complex) level, a normative framework of how to work with quality in VET in all Member States.

To sum up – the main question is that of the nature and scope of the work at European level: the right balance must be struck between the level of prescription and the necessary autonomy so as to leave room for adapting the framework to different settings and respecting different opinions.

This work can be done on a number of different levels, where we try to answer the following questions:

**Overview:** what are the overall steps in the work with quality in VET?

**Reference framework:** which areas do you need to consider when you are working with quality in VET?

**Checklist:** which major areas do you need to consider and what major options do you have in each area when you work with quality in VET?

**Instrument:** which detailed areas do you need to consider and what detailed options do you have in each area when you work with quality in VET?

**Normative:** how do you need to work with quality in VET?

This decision about the purpose of the work (and the level of simplicity of the framework) is not an easy one to make. One way to solve this problem is to successively build the different purposes up, starting with the overview, and then going to a common reference framework, which is the approach taken in this paper. It would be possible to follow the same logic if we wish to take this work further.

We can now conclude that, at this stage, the expected outcome of our work is mutual trust and that a simple framework providing an overview of the key steps and presenting a limited number of core criteria for quality in VET is the ultimate aim of this paper.

As mentioned above, the purpose and focus of the framework have been shifting in the course of our earlier work and the present paper tries to sharpen its focus. We are developing a framework that focuses on quality approaches used by any funding authority and VET provider for the purpose of promoting, controlling and improving performance quality in VET.

The purpose is – put simply – to create an overview of the quality approaches and to enhance mutual trust, and to keep the right balance between the level of prescription and the necessary autonomy to leave room for adapting the framework in different settings and respect different opinions.

#### *From the Quality Circle to the European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET*

The discussions on 31 March 2003 in the TWG focused on reducing the number of steps in our Quality Circle and simplifying the model even further. There was a common agreement that the basic structure of the approach should consist of four interrelated elements: Plan, Do, Check and React.

During the discussions we took each of the steps from the Quality Circle and tried to fit it into the ‘plan, do, check, react’ structure. This work resulted in the realisation that each of the steps in the work with quality involved the dimensions of ‘key actors’ and ‘degree of complexity’.

Those two dimensions taken together account for questions such as: who is going to participate in what? How? When? What type of measurement instruments are we going to use? For what? When? How are we going to analyse the data? How are we going to find the conclusions?

The existence of those two horizontal dimensions could be represented either by incorporating them in each of the four steps or by adding a fifth and more methodological step to the process. Finally, we opted for a fifth step, which is presented in the next chapter.

## 2. The European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET

Analysis of the contributions provided by the participants in the European Forum highlights a number of more or less specific answers to the very broad question of how the Member States handle the different aspects of quality in VET.

Our initial aim was to provide a systematic overview of these answers and examples of practice. But given the huge number of contributions and the wide variety of answers and examples of practice, continuation of this approach would be problematic.

But what alternative was there?

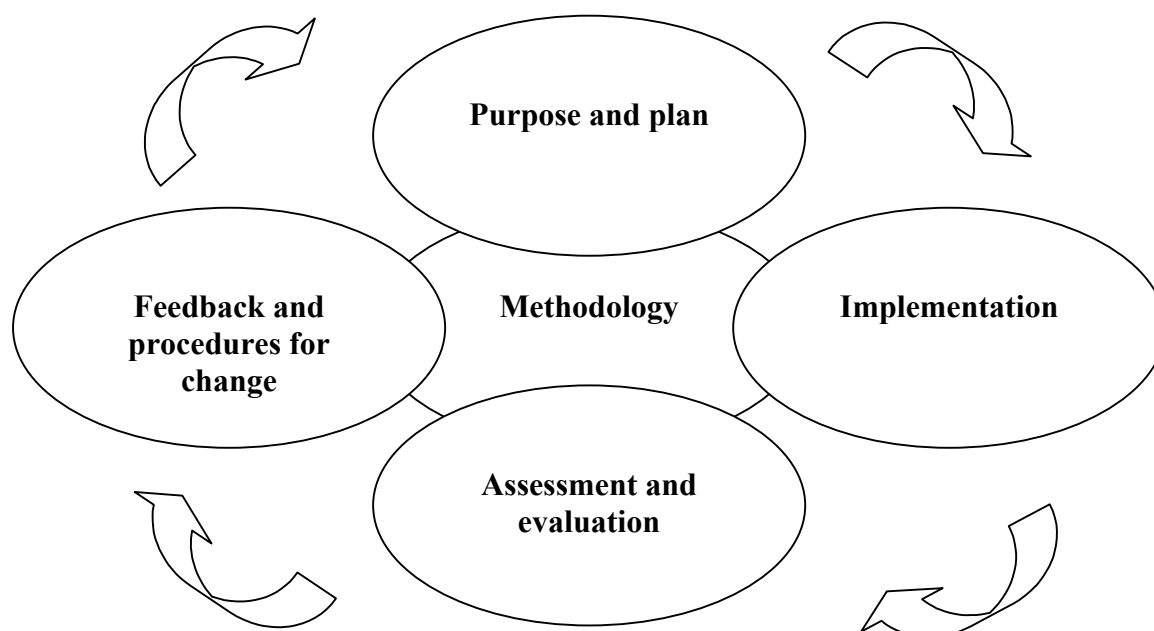
Instead of focusing on answers, the solution found was to focus on questions - questions that pinpoint the key issues in the work on quality in VET. Using this approach it was expected that the model would be more acceptable to all Member States as it makes it possible for the Member States to keep their own quality approaches and at the same time for the focus to be placed on a limited number of common questions.

The shift from answers to questions was strongly supported at both the second TWG meeting (31 March 2003) and at second meeting of the Copenhagen Coordination Group (18 June 2003). This support was mostly based on arguments related to the generic focus, tolerance of the many different approaches to quality and the flexibility that this approach adds to the work on quality in VET.

### 2.1 The European Common Reference Framework for quality in VET

The following framework, with its five steps, has taken all these demands into consideration:

*Figure 2. The European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET*





Each quality approach consists of a number of decisions made within the following five step of quality in VET. A quality approach needs:

- a purpose and plan of its own just as the VET activities need to have a purpose and a plan;
- to be implemented just as the VET activities are implemented;
- to be assessed and evaluated just as the VET activities need to be assessed and evaluated;
- to secure feedback and procedures for change just as the VET activities need a procedure for feedback and change;
- to follow a certain methodology just as the VET activities need to.

The common core criteria for quality can then be described as in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. The steps of the European Common Reference Framework and the common core criteria for quality in VET – an overview**

Reference framework step	Common core criteria for quality in VET	Possible indicators
Purpose and plan	Clear purpose and consistent planning addressed to achieve the set aims. Existence of a systematic quality approach (in a broad sense).	The existence of a quality management approach. Planned investment in training of trainers.
Implementation	Existence of an implementation plan; allocation of resources and clear responsibility.	Unemployment rates according to vulnerable groups. Prevalence of vulnerable groups. Participation rates (by group)
Assessment and evaluation	Existence of a well-described assessment system and a systematic evaluation strategy. Use of a consistent and accountable methodology for both assessment and evaluation.	Successful completion of training. Destination of trainees. Utilisation of acquired skills.
Feedback and procedures for change	Visible and documented connection between feedback mechanisms (evaluation results) and planning process.	Schemes to link VET to the labour market. Schemes to promote better access.
Methodology	Description of methodology (kind of 'standard procedure') exists.	

It is not our intention to decide *how* the Member States – or the providers - have to design the details of their quality approaches or how they have to operate their quality systems. But we want to focus the work on quality in VET on a small number of European core criteria for quality in VET, which if adopted by everyone, will become the *common* core quality criteria. These core quality criteria are described in detail in the next five sections.

The presented indicators are described in depth in the TWG report entitled 'A limited set of coherent quality indicators'.

It is neither possible nor helpful to completely separate the quality approach from the daily VET activities. The quality approach is a part of the daily VET activities and the daily VET activities cover a number of quality aspects. This complicates our framework but also makes it more realistic. The most important implication of this is the fact that in all the steps of our framework we need to cope both with the quality approach and the daily VET activities.

At a first glance it seems very difficult to allocate all VET activities and quality approaches to the relevant core criteria, but the consequences of making a wrong decision are only limited. The key point is that all major activities are allocated to one or another of the core criteria.

We compare the steps of the European Common Reference Framework with the nine criteria in the EFQM model and the at least twenty clauses of the ISO 9000 in Annex 1. This comparison shows that the simple European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET actually takes into consideration all the major criteria and clauses from both EFQM and ISO.

The European common core criteria are very broad and cover a number of activities. To keep the framework as simple as possible only a very limited number of questions will be addressed.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the steps in the European Common Reference Framework and of the European common core criteria and of the relevant questions.

**Figure 4. The European Common Core Criteria for quality in VET and the key questions related to each of them**

Common core criteria for quality in VET	Key questions
Purpose and plan	What are the goals/objectives of your organisation/system in relation to VET? Are your goals/objectives clear and measurable? Are the European VET goals and objectives included in the goals you set? How does your organisation/system measure/assess the degree to which these goals/objectives are fulfilled? Describe the procedure for the planning process within the quality approach in use. Give an example of a planned measure.
Implementation	How do you implement a planned action? (Use the example you referred to above.) Describe the key principles in the procedure of the implementation process.
Assessment and evaluation	Describe your procedure for assessing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the input</li> <li>• the processes</li> <li>• the output</li> <li>• the outcome results</li> </ul> How do you ensure that your assessment and evaluation is relevant and systematic? Which stakeholders participate in the assessment and evaluation process? What roles do the stakeholders play? When do you assess and evaluate (frequency)?
Feedback and procedures for change	How do you organise feedback and procedures for change in your organisation/system? How do you ensure systematic feedback? How do you make the feedback on quality in VET transparent? How do you ensure that the results of the assessment/evaluation are being used? How do you relate the goals/objectives to the assessment and evaluation?
Methodology	In what way do you use a systematic quality approach? Which stakeholders are involved in the different steps of your quality approach and in which roles?

	<p>Which tools and procedures do you use for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation?  Are the tools accountable and consistent?  How do you motivate the actors to play their roles properly?  What strategies assure the implementation of change?  In what way do you use external assessment?</p>
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The different European common core criteria for quality in VET will be described in more detail below. However, a short introduction will first be given to the use of the European Common Reference Framework.

*How to answer the questions?*

It should be pointed out that the above questions are questions that you have to raise when you want to obtain an overview of the quality of VET at a given level. And answers should also be given to those questions.

It is important to mention that the possible answers will only be regarded as indications, pointers, alternatives and inspiration in the search for quality.

The answers are closely related to – at least – the perceived quality of VET. The questions should help VET actors to focus their activities on a limited number of core activities within the field of quality in VET. Most of the questions are input-oriented and are therefore open to a wide range of possible answers. Most of the output-related questions refer to a specific context.

The questions are generic and – in principle – common to all levels, unlike the answers, which are closely connected to the context, namely the system or VET-provider levels. To illustrate what we mean and to inspire the different actors we have decided to present a small selection of possible answers. The variety of answers shows a wide range of ways of working with quality in VET. We have added a few cases from Member States with particular experience with some of the questions.

*Benefits of the framework seen from an internal point of view*

The VET systems or the VET providers who answer all these questions will benefit both from the answers and from the process. With differences in the complexity of the questions we have to expect differences in answers and processes. Needless to say the benefit will vary from question to question.

*Benefits of the framework seen from an external point of view*

Seen from an external (e.g. other Member State) point of view the answers may give a fair picture of the work on quality at both of the levels being addressed, namely the system and VET-provider levels. This may be one of the first steps towards mutual trust.

Many answers will be of the type: yes or no, followed by a long description of the activities and the work on quality.

**2.2 Purpose and plan**

The quality approach and the VET activities need to have a starting point, a purpose/direction and a plan of how to achieve that purpose. Figure 5 sets out the questions and possible answers relating to the core criteria for quality in the first step of the Quality Circle: purpose and plan.

**Figure 5. Purpose and plan**

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria</b>	<b>Possible answers at VET-provider level – core quality criteria</b>
Are your goals/objectives clear and measurable?	The European and national goals or purposes for VET are known throughout society. We have systematic procedures to identify future needs. We have a number of minimum objectives/standards. (Case 1)	The European, national and local goals are all known throughout the whole organisation.
What are the goals/objectives of your system/organisation in relation to VET?	(Description of the goals/objectives)	(Description of the goals/objectives)
Are the European goals* and objectives included in the goals you have set?	We have made an action plan to achieve the European goals.	We focus on few of the European goals in cooperation with VET providers from other Member States.
How does your organisation assess to what degree these goals/objectives are fulfilled?	The goals are communicated to the providers. Results on specific indicators are systematically collected.	Self-evaluation process takes place every second year. Reports are made by departments to management level on specific indicators.
Describe the procedure for the planning process within the quality approach in use.	(Description of the procedure)	(Description of the procedure)

\* E.g. goals on matching VET demand and supply, promoting access, accommodating the training needs of vulnerable groups.

The planned investment in training of staff can be seen as an indicator of future work on quality.

Clear and measurable goals/objectives, the inclusion of the European goals and how the organisation assesses the degree to which these goals/objectives are fulfilled – are all part of the core quality criteria in VET as far as Step 1 of the Quality Circle is concerned, namely purpose and plan.

**Case 1. Minimum objectives (Flanders)**

*‘The legislation of Flanders (Belgium) assumes that the minimum objectives must be broadly in line with society. To achieve this, an evenly balanced procedure has been developed including different phases that create a subtle balance between the various participants in the interplay of forces within society. The minimum standards and objectives that come about in this way gain the approval of the overwhelming majority of the stakeholders. At the same time realism and feasibility are sought in this procedure.*

*The procedure revolves around four important moments. In the first place the Department for Educational Development (DVO) formulates the design and construction. Next is the advisory phase, which consists of a debate within society on a formal recommendation by the Flemish Education Council and the SERV. Thirdly, there is the decision by the political administration, after which - in the fourth phase - assent follows through the Flemish Parliament.’*

*Quality standards related to the European common core criterion for quality: purpose and plan*  
In a number of Member States the output standards that apply to systems are closely related to the first step: ‘purpose and plan’. Policy goals on dropout rates, rates of students going on to further education, and investment in training in private companies are examples of such output standards at system level and (partly) at VET-provider level. Funding may be made dependent on the documentation of results on standards (DK).

### **2.3 Implementation**

The quality approach has to be implemented just as the daily teaching and learning activities have to be. Implementation covers a wide range of activities.

Figure 6 sets out the questions and possible answers relating to the second step of the Quality Circle: implementation.

**Figure 6. Implementation**

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at VET-provider level – core quality criteria
How do you implement a planned action?	By legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad and narrow regulations, laws, rules</li> <li>• National quality approach</li> <li>• Demand for a quality approach at provider level</li> </ul> By funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on input</li> <li>• Based on output</li> </ul> By the contribution of the social partners By the work of the VET providers	Existence of a systematic quality approach and plan. Sharing this with the other actors. Involvement of local actors and adaptation to local needs. Investment in training of staff. By developing and communicating a staff policy based on the strategies and the planning of the VET provider organisation. Aligning tasks, authority and responsibilities.
Describe the key principles in the procedure of the implementation process.	Giving the full responsibility for implementation to VET-providers. Setting up a number of minimum criteria the providers have to meet (Case 2). Given a specific quality approach to be used by all providers.	By organising and by allocating funds to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance and resources</li> <li>• Partnership</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Process management</li> <li>• Training of trainers</li> <li>• Didactical material</li> </ul> Demand for transparency and coherence with goals. By involving different stakeholders in the work. Ensuring good working conditions and facilities throughout the organisation.

How the organisation implements the planned actions and the key principles it follows in the implementation process – are all part of the core quality criteria relating to the second step in the Quality Circle, namely implementation.

**Case 2. Minimum criteria for the VET-providers (Austria)**

- 1) Each State school has to meet a minimum of criteria. Modern equipment facilitates education according to the demands of industry.
- 2) Teachers of theoretical subjects in higher vocational schools must have professional experience in the relevant area in addition to university training.
- 3) The framework curricula are defined and updated regularly by the responsible ministry. School autonomy regulations provide schools with the opportunity to develop their own specific profiles, thus meeting the needs and requirements of the individual regions.

*Quality standards related to implementation*

A number of the input and process standards that apply to systems can be related to implementation, e.g. regulations on time, courses and examinations, pupils per class, the different laws and educational systems.

If we look at the implementation-related input and process standards that apply to providers, we get a number of standards relating to staff qualifications, resources, examinations and standards for the quality system, the various labels, or the self-assessment approach to be used by the VET provider.

## 2.4 Assessment and evaluation

Day-to-day training and learning activities have to be assessed and evaluated just as the quality approaches have to be.

Figure 7 sets out the key questions and possible answers relating to assessment and evaluation.

**Figure 7. Assessment and evaluation**

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria</b>	<b>Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria</b>
Describe your process for assessing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input?</li> <li>• Processes?</li> <li>• Output?</li> <li>• Outcome results?</li> </ul>	By the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control systems</li> <li>• Inspectorates</li> <li>• Public access to the Web</li> <li>• Benchmarking (with other providers)</li> </ul> By national standards on input, processes and output. By assessing coherence between results and policy priorities.	By the use of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluation</li> <li>• External inspection</li> <li>• Internal quality control</li> </ul> The actual results compared to the expected results. Results of teaching and learning. Staff-oriented results. Key performance results. Societal results.
How do you ensure that your assessment and evaluation is relevant and systematic?	By systematic procedures for data collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of indicators</li> <li>• Measurements</li> </ul>	By asking the users.
Which stakeholders participate in the assessment and evaluation process?	The system level and the social partners. A Quality Institute (Case 3)	Managers, teachers, students, parents and the employers of the students.
What roles do the different stakeholders play?	Depends on the stakeholders and the situation e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiatives</li> <li>Decisions</li> <li>Evaluation</li> <li>Certification</li> <li>Political support</li> <li>Legitimacy of political decisions.</li> </ul>	The stakeholders participate in a broad range of activities e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiatives</li> <li>Decisions</li> <li>Evaluation</li> <li>Certification</li> <li>The link to the Labour Market.</li> </ul>
When do you assess and evaluate (frequency)?	On the occasion of VET reforms, every third to fifth year.	After completing education. During the period when the students attend school.

As far as assessment and evaluation are concerned, the core criteria for quality in VET relate to how and when the organisation evaluates and assesses its activities and how it ensures relevant and systematic assessment and evaluation with the participation of stakeholders.

### **Case 3. The Portuguese Quality Institute**

*In the context of quality assessment, the National Association of Vocational Schools, as well as other associations, institutes and bodies of the Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Quality Institute, have been taking part since 1998 in the project Model for Quality Certification of Vocational Schools.*

*The Portuguese Quality Institute is a national institute responsible for the management and development of the Portuguese Quality System.*

*The national model for quality certification is based on ISO 9000 and TQM standards. This model, while not preventing any future certification under ISO or TQM standards, may provide a guarantee of effectiveness and adequacy.*

*The Portuguese Quality Institute is now responsible for the accreditation of the different certifying bodies as well as for the publication of information about quality, especially technical information.*

*Quality standards relating to assessment and evaluation, i.e. the third step of the Quality Circle*  
Standards relating to assessment and evaluation are often already laid down in the structure of the educational system or by regulations.

Examples of standards that relate to input and processes and that apply both to systems and to VET-providers are cases in which self-assessment, inspections, the use of different quality labels, the accreditation of VET institutions, the accreditation of employers to train are required by law.

## **2.5 Feedback and procedures for change**

The assessments and evaluations must be used. This implies both feedback to the participants and users of the work and a systematic procedure for change.

Figure 8 shows the key questions and possible answers relating to feedback and procedures for change.

**Figure 8. Feedback and procedures for change**

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria</b>	<b>Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria</b>
How do you organise feedback and the procedures for change in your organisation?	The feedback procedures are defined by regulations and revised and changed through reforms of the VET system e.g. every 3 to 5 years.	Feedback and the procedures for change are an integral part of the provider's own learning organisation.
How do you ensure systematic feedback?	Feedback follows a predefined plan. Feedback takes place on an ad hoc basis.	Each department has to report to management in accordance with a fixed plan.
How do you make the feedback on quality in VET transparent?	By placing the data and the conclusions on the homepage. By arranging a number of seminars /conferences on quality in VET.	All the information is accessible on the provider's homepage or on paper.
How do you ensure that the results of the assessment/evaluation are being used?	By the transparency of the work. By inspectors. By establishing complaint procedures. By sanctions and rewards/funding.	By a combination of control and development meetings with the different departments. By the participation of many different stakeholders in the work.



How do you relate goals/objectives to the assessment and evaluation?	On the occasion of the reforms. When the annual tenders are awarded (Case 4).	At meetings at departmental and college levels as a systematic part of our decision-making structure.
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The ways feedback and procedures for change are organised, the ways you ensure that the results of assessment/evaluation are being used, the ways the organisation makes the quality of VET transparent, the way you ensure systematic feedback - all belong in the ‘feedback and procedures for change’, namely step 4 of the Quality Circle and constitute the relevant quality criteria. The above possible answers represent for us the *core* quality criteria relating to this step.

#### **Case 4. Annual tenders (Italy)**

*The Italian VET system is largely based on a market system: every year, regional governments launch tenders to find vocational training centres or agencies that are able to provide initial and continuing training courses that meet the demands of people and employers. This system is very flexible because each year the system has to change in order to meet new demands. On the other hand, it is difficult to build up each year a system that can accommodate more than 500 000 people and to choose the best agencies from among the large supply.*

*The solution to this problem is to draw up nationally a set of minimum criteria for the accreditation of training centres or agencies, criteria that regional governments can later add to or expand according to local needs. The aim is to ensure that all training structures, applying for funding from regional governments to perform vocational training activities, meet minimum standards of quality.*

*Finally, after approval by the Conference of State and Regional Governments of 22 May 2003, the Ministry of Labour introduced a decree setting minimum quality standards that training centres or agencies have to meet in order to be accredited by regional governments and therefore offer their training activities in the area concerned.*

*The requirements that training centres or agencies must fulfil relate to the following aspects:*

- *management of the institutions*
- *their financial situation*
- *characteristics of teaching and administrative staff*
- *efficiency and effectiveness of previous activities*
- *links and contacts at local level.*

*Only the centres or agencies that can demonstrate they have achieved the minimum level required are allowed to take part in regional tenders.*

*For each of these five criteria, the decree establishes 1) indicators (sets of quantitative and qualitative phenomena that are measured and assessed); 2) parameters (stating the level of the quantitative phenomena and the characteristics of the qualitative phenomena) and 3) indices (setting the thresholds of the quantitative parameters or fixing requirements and conditions for the qualitative parameters). These indices vary for the various forms of training.*

#### *Quality standards relating to the fourth step of the Quality Circle, i.e. feedback and procedures for change*

The quality standards that are related to feedback and procedures for change are mainly defined indirectly by the different quality approaches and quality labels. The large number of reforms and development plans in most Member states include – even indirectly - a standard relating to feedback and procedures for change.

Due to the complexity of the world of education and the changing political focus, it is difficult to see a clear connection between plans, implementation, assessment and evaluation and feedback processes.

## 2.6 Methodology

There are a number of methodological decisions within each of the steps of the Quality Circle. They include decisions about actors, the design of assessment and evaluation tools, the procedures for planning, implementation and feedback and the decisions that combine all four steps analysed so far in order to create a unified system. The methodology also has taken into account the issue of ethics in access to and use of information at the individual and VET-provider levels.

The possible answers to the key questions relating to methodology set out below (see Figure 9) constitute for us *core* quality criteria for methodology. As this is so important, we have decided methodology should be analysed separately, like the four steps of the Quality Circle, despite the fact that, as we have also said above, methodology is a ‘horizontal’ aspect and as such is present throughout the Quality Circle.

Figure 9 sets out the questions and possible answers relating to the methodology.

**Figure 9. Methodology**

<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria</b>	<b>Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria</b>
In what way do you use a systematic quality approach?	We follow the usual procedures of the Ministry.	We have decided to use one based on the standard quality systems, e.g. ISO or EFQM.
Which stakeholders are involved in the different steps of your quality approach and in which roles?	At national level the social partners play a major role together with the political actors. Accreditation agencies play a major role (Case 5).	A number of different actors - from social partners, to parents and students - are involved. External consultants participate in some parts of the activities.
Which tools and procedures do you use for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation?	A number of tools and procedures at system level have been developed e.g. common questionnaires and scales for measurement. No common tools are available.	We develop common questionnaires, instruments for measuring quality, benchmarking, etc. together with a selected group of other VET-providers.
How do you motivate the actors to play their role properly?	The external actors are motivated by political influence and participation in the Advisory Board on VET. Close cooperation with the world of work.	The external actors are motivated by their influence over the VET providers, e.g. as board members. Internally, the main motivation is personal development. Consideration for the image/results of the institution
What strategies assure the implementation of change?	The political decision-making process and the many different stakeholders’ involvement in the process. The market forces create the pressure for change.	The systematic structure of our quality system includes clear strategies for change.
In what way do you use external assessment?	In the event of problems and as a result of a national assessment plan.	Audit following our plans.

The use of a systematic approach, the tools and procedures used for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation, the motivation of the actors, the strategies that assure the implementation of change and the use of external assessment constitute for us the core quality criteria relating to methodology.

**Case 5. Accreditation agencies (Germany)**

*An intensive discussion is currently under way in Germany about the certification of quality standards for publicly financed VET. The Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour will enact regulations on the basis of new legislation in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. These regulations will stipulate some quality standards for publicly financed VET. Furthermore, there are many accreditation agencies which certify VET providers (see [www.qm-world.de](http://www.qm-world.de)). In addition, some Länder have established quality associations, which certify providers who have developed their own standards.*

**Case 6. Closer cooperation with the world of work (Norway)**

*In Norway closer cooperation with the world of work means that schools and enterprises consider VET as a common responsibility and cooperate in order to provide pupils with the best qualifications for entering the labour market. Pupils with poor motivation for schooling may follow their entire training programme in an enterprise. The theoretical and practical requirements are the same as for ordinary courses.*

*Quality standards relating to methodology*

The first quality standard relating to methodology is the very existence of a quality approach, which is often imposed by law or by market forces.

Most quality approaches include a number of tools and procedures for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation, which can be seen as standards.

The participation of the social partners in a number of activities is another quality standard relating to methodology and so are the roles of the different local, regional and national bodies and public authorities.

**3. Standards and norms and the European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET**

The five steps analysed so far that together create the European Common Reference Framework on Quality in VET can be seen as major principles to follow or as ‘meta-standards’. These types of ‘meta-standards’ can be seen as necessary preconditions for quality in VET, e.g. you need a clear purpose for your VET activities.

<b>Framework steps</b>	<b>Examples of Standards and Norms</b>
Purpose and plan	Output standards on e.g. policy goals on dropout, further education, effectiveness of education, innovation, etc. and better quality for further education and VET.
Implementation	Input and process standards relating to staff qualifications, resources and curricula.
Assessment and evaluation	Input and process standards relating to accreditation of institutions/employers, testing criteria set by regulation.
Feedback and procedures for change	Comparing policy goals and output standards with the results from the assessments and evaluations.
Methodology	International, national and local quality approaches.

Unfortunately, as the reader will no doubt be aware, the data on the use of standards and norms within quality in VET in the Member States are still very limited. This in turn means that the number of conclusions we can reach is also limited.

#### **4. Proposals for further work and concrete actions**

The work on quality in VET does not stop here. The work has to go on at a number of levels. A number of possible actions are related to the framework developed above and other actions are connected to the first - more or less - clear conclusions from our analysis and use of the European Common Reference Framework.

##### *Possible actions in relation to the European Common Reference Framework*

- Development of a user guide for the European Common Reference Framework. In order to secure a proper use of the presented European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET, we need to make the framework more detailed and easy to use – especially at the provider level. A short but detailed user guide has to be developed. The guide could include the following topics:
  - definitions – more detailed and with concrete local examples from VET-providers;
  - the advantages for the provider from working with the framework;
  - how to use the framework – a description of the working methods in relation to the key questions in Figures 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9;
  - using the process of answering those questions as a way to gain insight into the weaknesses and strengths of one’s activities;
  - going through the process of meeting the core quality criteria as a means of developing a quality approach in VET.

A user guide can be made for small and medium-sized companies, taking their special conditions into account.

- Testing 1. We have to test the strengths and weaknesses of our reference framework, which is hopefully both comprehensive and simple.  
Here we need a number of practical and live tests of the reference framework. This work has to be done both on system and VET-provider levels in order to secure the maximum experience and response. The test can be organised very flexibly: it can be conducted on the entire framework or – in more depth – on a single step in the reference framework. But taken together, the tests have provided both broad and in-depth conclusions on the strengths and weaknesses of the European Common Reference Framework.
- Testing 2. On a more content-oriented level, we have to look with a critical eye at the key questions and especially the possible answers that constitute the core quality criteria. We developed the key questions in such a way that they would be sufficiently broad. But with a huge number of different countries, regions, systems and institutions we expect a number of challenges both in relation to the content and the formulation of the questions.  
This part can be tested within the different Member States on both system and VET-provider levels.
- Dissemination of the framework. We have to consider how to communicate the framework to a broader audience than the participants in the TWG.  
To do this both effectively and efficiently we have to work on several levels: European, national, system and VET-provider. A communication plan has to be drawn up to coordinate all the activities and actors. We must realise that our communication platform must make use of both electronic and paper media, if we want a broader group to react to our communication.

- Implementation of the European Common Reference Framework. Needless to say, before proceeding with implementation on a voluntary basis, we need to find answers to fundamental questions such as: what is the purpose of the implementation? How will implementation be assessed? How will feedback on the use of the reference framework be organised? Who will be involved in the various implementation steps?

LdV projects may be a way both to promote the European Common Reference Framework on quality in VET and to implement the framework on a number of different levels.

- Accreditation. We should focus on the possible use of the European Common Reference Framework in the accreditation of VET-providers and VET systems. The framework raises major questions in relation to accreditation, but lacks many of the more detailed data on which accreditation has to be based. This area could be of interest for further work on how far it is possible to simplify a framework for use in accreditation.
- Voluntary peer review. Voluntary peer review on government, regional, functional and institutional levels is a tool to obtain further experience with the European Common Reference Framework developed and to ensure that the framework is communicated to a broader audience.
- Measurement. There is good reason to focus on some well-defined areas where output can be measured. This must take place both on system and VET-provider levels so as to allow comparisons of vocational education and training to be made at European level. Comparisons at national level would focus on the results of VET-providers.
- Standards and norms. The question of standards and norms in relation to the different European common core quality criteria in VET must also be tackled. In this connection, opinions range from strong support for a European Quality Standard to support for purely national solutions. There is also a wide variety of opinion as to whether there should be minimum standards and norms or maximum standards and norms.

Despite these differences of opinion, it must be of common interest to add standards and norms to each of the steps in the framework and to each of the common core quality criteria in VET. A project like this demands a certain amount of information from all Member States in order to gain an overview of the standards and norms in use and the experiences deriving from their use.

#### *Possible actions emerging from the conclusions of the analysis*

- Use and advantage of a quality approach in VET. It is still difficult to discern a clear link between the use of a quality approach on the one hand and the actual and the perceived quality in VET on the other. This problem is very complex and more research is needed. The starting point could be to ask a number of Member States what they think the relationship is between the different quality approaches and the quality of VET achieved. The crucial question will be: does your quality approach have any measurable impact on the quality of your VET provision?
- Action at system level. The fact that the quality logic used at provider level is very rarely used at system level too, suggests that action should be taken at the system level. The key questions in the European Common Reference Framework should be raised and answers sought in a number of Member States.

The 'grey zone' between the VET-provider and system levels raises a number of challenges for most VET systems. Very often we see two - more or less - separate levels, where only one level (i.e. the system level) lays down the rules while the other (the VET-provider) mere has to follow them. In our future work we have to look at all the actors and activities within VET as an interrelated system, and focus on how to organise the work in even closer cooperation than in the past.

- Feedback and change. The fact that feedback and mechanisms for change are not very often present in quality approaches in VET shows the need for action in this connection. Further research into possible feedback tools could hopefully inspire the actors to organise this process better.
- Administrative staff and processes. Most of the above, as already indicated, has focused on teachers and managers, but what about the administrative staff and all the administrative processes within a VET provider? The various quality approaches imply close cooperation between managers, teachers and administrators. An analysis of the administrative processes in VET could contribute to the further development of VET in Europe.
- Public/private VET. Most of the experiences on which we base our findings and conclusions are from the public sector of VET. But VET is not only a public activity, many companies, private enterprises and institutions are working with VET every day. It is of interest to collect and analyse the experience from this part of the VET world so that the public and private sectors can learn from one another. The analysis may be conducted using case studies not only of major international companies and institutions but also of national, regional and local SMEs active in the field of VET and sensitive to the issue of its quality. These case studies could focus on either the VET activities as a whole or on their individual parts.
- Comparison of standards and norms. Another field of work for the future could be the relationship between the existing standards and norms and the European common core quality criteria still to be defined in the course of the work of the TWG. In the report on standards and norms we conclude that 'standards can be seen as minimum goals or amounts of a certain factor which indicate the expectation of a certain level of quality, when followed (and the goals achieved). Standards can be set for input, process and output.'

## **Annex 1. The European Common Reference Framework and the two major quality management approaches: ISO and EFQM**

One of the first findings of our work was that there are a large number of different ways of working with quality. Most of these approaches to quality are – at a first glance – unique. But on closer inspection, a number of common basic aspects can be found. In addition, there is a small number of quality concepts which are used in a number of different Member States, of which the ISO and EFQM models are the most commonly used in VET.

But realising this raises the question: why develop a new quality reference framework when there are already a number on the market?

The answer is simple. We have searched for a framework that at the same time both covers all the core criteria for promoting quality in VET and respects the different local choices within each Member State. This approach may motivate more people to carry out serious work on quality in VET than if we had decided to adopt one of the main quality management approaches already available.

A short presentation of both EFQM and ISO follows below.

### **EFQM**

The EFQM Excellence Model is a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria. Five of these are 'Enablers' and four are 'Results'. The 'Enabler' criteria cover what an organisation does. The 'Results' criteria cover what an organisation achieves. 'Results' are caused by 'Enablers' and feedback from 'Results' help to improve 'Enablers'.

The model, which recognises that there are many approaches to achieving sustainable excellence in all aspects of performance, is based on the premise that:

*'Excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through Leadership driving Policy and Strategy that is delivered through People Partnerships and Resources, and Processes.'*

### **ISO**

The acronym-like term 'ISO' stands for the International Organisation for Standardisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Founded in 1947 for the purpose of advancing standardisation around the world, this non-governmental organisation now comprises over 130 member countries. Each country is represented by its respective national standards body and participates in developing standards to facilitate trade of goods and services in the global marketplace. The standards developed apply not only to economic related activities but also cover the related technology and science involved in these pursuits.

Often thought to be an acronym, the term 'ISO' is actually derived from the Greek word 'issos' which means 'equal' or 'equivalent'. From this word comes the modern prefix 'iso-' which occurs in words such as 'isotonic' and 'isogonic' each having the concept of equivalency in its definition.

The ISO 9000 series of quality management standards was developed by the ISO/TC 176 (ISO Technical Committee 176) convened in 1979. It set out to create a framework of the fundamental generic elements that would form the basis for a series of internationally recognised quality management standards, which it completed in 1982 and published in 1983. The ISO 9000 series of standards represents the essential requirements that every enterprise needs to address to ensure the consistent production and timely delivery of its goods and services to the

marketplace. These requirements make up the standards that comprise the quality management system, and their generic nature allows for their application in any type of organisation.

ISO 9000 comes with four parts as follows (Samuel K.M. Ho, *De Monfort University, Leicester, UK* Is the ISO 9000 Series for Total Quality Management? *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, Volume 11 Number 9 1994 pp. 74-89):

- 1 *ISO 9001*: This is applicable in contractual situations whereby the supplier is capable of demonstrating its ability in design, development, production, installation and servicing.
- 2 *ISO 9002*: This is applicable for contractual usage, and product conformance can be achieved through production and installation.
2. *ISO 9003*: This is applicable for quality assurance in final inspections and tests with the aim of detecting and controlling the disposition of any product non-conformity.
3. *ISO 9004*: This serves as a guideline in developing and implementing a quality management system.

The 'Quality System Requirement' (Section 4) of ISO 9001 has 20 clauses which stipulate the conduct for a good quality management system. They are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 4.1 Management responsibility               | 4.11 Inspection, measuring and test equipment  |
| 4.2 Quality system                          | 4.12 Inspection and test status                |
| 4.3 Contract review                         | 4.13 Control of non-conforming product         |
| 4.4 Design control                          | 4.14 Corrective action                         |
| 4.5 Document control                        | 4.15 Handling, storage, packaging and delivery |
| 4.6 Purchasing                              | 4.16 Quality records                           |
| 4.7 Purchaser supplied product              | 4.17 Internal quality audits                   |
| 4.8 Product identification and traceability | 4.18 Training                                  |
| 4.9 Process control                         | 4.19 Servicing                                 |
| 4.10 Inspection and testing                 | 4.20 Statistical techniques                    |

The presented twenty clauses for a good management system can be enhanced further in other ISO-models.

Table 1 shows the overlap between the European Reference Model on quality in VET and the two major quality management approaches: ISO and EFQM.



**Figure 10. A comparison between the European Common Reference Framework, ISO and EFQM**

<i>The European Common Reference Framework on Quality in VET</i>	<b>ISO (www.iso9000.org)</b>	<b>EFQM (www.efqm.org)</b>
Purpose and plan	Management responsibility.	Policy and Strategy
Implementation	Contract review Purchasing Purchaser-supplied product Product identification and traceability Handling, storage, packaging and delivery Training Servicing. Statistical techniques	People, Partnerships and Resources, and Processes.
Assessment and evaluation	Design control Document control Process control Inspection and testing Inspection, measuring and test equipment Inspection and test status Control of non-conforming product Quality records Internal quality audits	Leadership, results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society
Feedback and procedures for change	Corrective action	Leadership and the processes
Methodology	Quality system	People