

This report presents the results of a Peer Learning Activity, which has been prepared by the independent expert named on the cover. The report is based on a peer learning activity where policymakers and practitioners from a number of countries exchanged ideas and experiences on an issue of shared policy interest. This report reflects the opinions of the participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or ENQA-VET position.

Peer Learning Activity on
Quality Assurance procedures for
Accreditation
"A forum for exchange"

27-29 April, 2009 - Rome

Peer Learning Report
June 2009

Content

0. **Foreword**, objective of the PLA.
 1. **Executive Summary** and **key recommendations** for policy makers at European level, national level, regional level, provider level and system level.
 2. **Introduction:**
 - a) The policy context: how the PLA fits in it
 - b) Introduction, PLA's rationale.
 - c) Importance of the particular PLA's theme in relation to the policy context.
 3. **Content:**
 - a) Description of issues emerged from the **exchange of experience**, using the quality cycle criteria (EQARF/CQAF) as the **instrument to exchange experiences and capture best practices**.
 - b) Identification of **key findings** from the exchange of experience process, which should be relevant in the **policy making context**.
 - c) Identification of **transferable** elements or national practices in relation to quality assurance.
 - d) **European added value and/or new knowledge** as an outcome of the exchange of experience process.
 4. **Process:** an evaluation of the objectives of the PLA and an analysis of the PLA post-activity questionnaire.
 5. **Conclusion** on process and expected impact of the PLA at European, national, local and system level.
 6. **Policy Recommendations:**
 - a) policy recommendations on the PLA as a way of working within the Open Method of Coordination.
 - b) policy recommendations on the subject of the PLA's.
- References**

O. Foreword

From 27th till 29th of April 2009 the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on Accreditation took place in Rome¹.

Fourteen participants from different European countries took part, besides some representatives of the Italian host. The participants were member of national VET-(QA)-organizations in Portugal, Austria, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, Denmark, Czech Republic, Rumania, Cyprus, Scotland (UK), Luxembourg, Finland, Malta; from the European Union of Social Partners and Cedefop. Giorgio Allulli and his team was host, Everard van Kemenade was accreditation expert.

Based on findings of the host and expert added with the results of the pre-PLA questionnaire² a program has been developed for the three day workshop. The *Guidelines for PLA reports* state: "*The peer learning activity will go beyond an information gathering exercise and will provide a forum for exchange of expertise and reflection. It is **imperative during the PLA that adequate time is allocated for on-going reflection and feedback stages during the PLAs and in the subsequent evaluation and reporting mechanism***" (o.c., p.1).

This report evaluates the output of the PLA towards content as well as process.

¹ We hereby follow the definition of Cedefop, derived from ISO9000:2000 that accreditation is *Formal recognition that a body or a person is competent to carry out specific tasks*. In the PLA the focus was on the accreditation of institutes or programs, not persons.

² See: Van Kemenade, E.A. *Peer Learning Activity on Accreditation. Report on pre-activity questionnaires*, May 12nd 2009.

1. Executive summary

Accreditation can be an instrument to assure confidence in the quality of an institution. Accreditation is not mentioned in the Recommendation document as such. In the COAF it is said that accreditation agencies can play a major Role on system level. *“A specific monitoring measure, which is close to control, is the accreditation of VET providers, used in many Member States³. to harmonise and legitimate a wide variety of VET providers. This means compelling VET providers to meet a set of fixed minimum standards in order to be incorporated – at least for some time – in a VET system. This is particularly important for continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in which there was often little regulation and review of quality. Such initiatives have been taken both by public authorities, increasingly linked to financial incentives, and by the CVET market itself, as a self-regulation mechanism” (o.c., p.12).*

Italy has an experience in accreditation of VET since 2000. This long term experience can be of significant value for other countries. Furthermore the Italian system itself is open for continuous improvement and could make use of the feedback of a European group of experts like gathered in a PLA.

Accreditation could become an instrument to assure confidence of the quality of VET in Europe. In doing so it could contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives by providing effective vocational education and training.

In the end it could enforce the mobility of learners and workers throughout Europe, provided some sort of mutual recognition of accreditation systems is achieved.

The process of the PLA in general can be considered to be successful. The PLA will have an impact on national level, the impact on European level is more unlikely. Only five participants have ideas in this direction. Furthermore it has to be considered that many important European players were not attending (e.g. France, Spain, and Germany).

Suggestions for improvement were focused mainly on better time management (3x) and use of English as PLA-language (3x).

The discussions on the subject lead to two observations synthesized by the expert: the dichotomy of accountability and improvement and the co-occurrence of input-output-throughput process and content.

³ From the participating countries in the PLA seven had an accreditation system, three were developing one.

Using the description model for external assessment (Van Kemenade, 2009) a two-way-system of quality assurance could be designed:

	External Quality Management System	Internal Quality Management System
<i>Function</i>	Accountability	Improvement
	Mandatory	Voluntary
<i>Object</i>	Institution, Quality Management System	Process (e.g. educational program)
<i>Basic rules</i>	External (minimum) standards	Fitness for purpose (de organisation designs its own goals) / strive for excellence
<i>Stakeholders</i>	All, especially government	All, especially the customer
<i>Organisaiton</i>	Government or semi-governmental	The institution (using other stakeholders, like social partners)
<i>Methods</i>	Management review Document analysis Site visit Certification	Self evaluation Site visit Improvement report
<i>Subject</i>	Professional auditors	Peers
<i>Values</i>	Control	Continuous improvement en commitment

Table 11 : Two way system of quality assurance

Any way a quality assurance system should refer to processes. You can think of the input-throughput-output of students, including the testing leading to a qualified student. It is the process of entrance- added value and qualification of the student towards a job.

But also the quality assurance should focus on process of the content, the course. That is: the development of a course, the execution and evaluation leading to a good educational program. The qualifications here are at the beginning as well as at the end (and in between).

The measurement should be quantitative as well as qualitative.

2. Introduction

2.a. The policy context

The Lisbon Strategy, also known as the Lisbon Agenda or Lisbon Process, is an action and development plan for the European Union. Its aim is to make the EU *"the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010"*. It was set out by the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000. Intensified global competition, high numbers of low skilled workers in the workforce and an ageing population are some of the challenges facing Europe. Structured action in the field of education and training can help prepare individuals for today's society and are vital for Europe's future competitiveness and innovation. The Lisbon European Council considered that the overall aim was to raise the overall employment rate in the European Union to 70% and the female employment rate to more than 60% by 2010. The Stockholm European Council (March 2001) added two intermediate targets and one additional target:

1. the overall employment rate and the female employment rate to reach 67% and 57% respectively in 2005;
2. the employment rate for older workers to reach 50% by 2010.

The Barcelona Council (March 2002) called for the reinforcement of the European Employment Strategy as an instrument of the Lisbon Strategy.

The Barcelona Council promotes amongst others mobility in the European Union for all those involved in education, research and innovation. The target set by the Barcelona European Council of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 put the issue of how to build and ensure quality of VET systems at the centre of the Education and Training policy agenda. The Council Resolution and the Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET, which launched the Copenhagen process, provided important pointers towards the Barcelona target. A central part of the process is the development of common European frameworks and tools to enhance the transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications, making the mobility of learners and workers easier. Milestone in the process has been the establishment of a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET (CQAF) in 2003. The CQAF approach⁴ was endorsed by the Council, which invited both Member States and the Commission to promote it through practical initiatives involving the relevant stakeholders, on a voluntary basis.

⁴ See: Technical Working Group 'Quality in VET' *Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET in Europe*, 11/06/2004

On April 9th 2008 the European Commission published a proposal *Recommendation of the European parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*. The proposal states: "Education and training systems must be flexible enough to respond to a wide range of needs, while maintaining overall coherence across different levels of implementation. The effectiveness and efficiency of training provision in meeting such needs must be regularly evaluated, monitored and improved, on the basis of evidence. Quality assurance is a means to achieve this". (o.c., p. 3). Quality assurance has been defined by Cedefop, derived from ISO9000:2000 as: *Part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled*.

2.b. Rationale

Accreditation can be an instrument to assure confidence in the quality of an institution. Accreditation is not mentioned in the Recommendation document as such. In the COAF it is said that accreditation agencies can play a major Role on system level. "A specific monitoring measure, which is close to control, is the accreditation of VET providers, used in many Member States⁵. to harmonise and legitimate a wide variety of VET providers. This means compelling VET providers to meet a set of fixed minimum standards in order to be incorporated – at least for some time – in a VET system. This is particularly important for continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in which there was often little regulation and review of quality. Such initiatives have been taken both by public authorities, increasingly linked to financial incentives, and by the CVET market itself, as a self-regulation mechanism" (o.c., p.12).

Italy has an experience in accreditation of VET since 2000. This long term experience can be of significant value for other countries. Furthermore the Italian system itself is open for continuous improvement and could make use of the feedback of a European group of experts like gathered in a PLA.

2.c. Importance

Accreditation could become an instrument to assure confidence of the quality of VET in Europe. In doing so it could contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives by providing effective vocational education and training. In the end it could enforce the mobility of learners and workers throughout Europe, provided some sort of mutual recognition of accreditation systems is achieved.

⁵ From the participating countries in the PLA seven had an accreditation system, three were developing one.

3. Content

3.a. Issues

The pre-activity questionnaire already raised the following important issues that the participants wanted to work on in the PLA:

1. Exchange methods and tools (also implementation of an audit model with external audits, presentation of models used, Law for Accreditation, the connection of accreditation with benefits from State)
2. Lessons we can learn and lessons we can share (also visit Italian VET-providers and see good practice examples)
3. Discussion of advantages and disadvantages of accreditation and concerns and initiatives in other countries, successes and difficulties
4. Common understanding, but no pan-European unified accreditation
5. Indicators for efficiency and effectiveness (including statistical background and evidence for accreditation)

In the PLA these objectives have been SMARTened⁶ in an short individual session and the participants each chose a photo to make their objective visible.

The following best practices have been mentioned:

Country	Strength-best practice
Austria	Securing diversity and finances
Cyprus	-
Czech R	Based on tradition and evolving upon European principles Strong involvement of employers and other social partners Good cooperation between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor
Denmark	The improvement aspect
Estonia	Enough funds for preparation EKKA high renomee and good use
Finland	Close cooperation with education providers
Italy	Good cooperation between Ministries and Regions. Monitoring of the process
Lux	Unique system at national level with good legal base
Malta	Intended QA Agency
Nether.	-
Portugal	System based in TQM (design of standard, internal control system, site visit methodology) Well known and accepted system Recognised added value
Rumania	Legal framework
Scotland	The onus is placed firmly and squarely on the awarding body Risk-based and increased self assessment in the system
Slovenia	National validity of programs and qualifications and social partnership approach National set of indicators and individual school goals

Table 1: Strengths, weaknesses and best practices.

⁶ Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound

The Italian case provided a lot of insights and e.g. the following issues for debate:

- National versus regional system
- Quality of process (input-throughput-output) versus quality of content
- Accreditation related to National Qualifications
- Accreditation related to ISO9001:2008 certification

3.b. Key findings

The main findings of the PLA are related to the Italian accreditation system. The system has been presented by all stakeholders (see program of PLA on Accreditation) and discussed with the participants. On day three a reflection slot specifically was allocated to giving feedback from the participants to the Italian accreditation system. The results are presented in table 2.

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong involvement of relevant stakeholders. • Existence of procedures for continuous system review. • The system is designed within a long term framework. • Right balance between national and regional needs. • The system model and its quality criteria are compatible and reflect the EQARF/CQAF. • The model is linked to LLL perspective. • The system recognises and builds on cultural/historical/exiting internal process to support the accreditation process. • On-line managerial tools are put in place to speed the accreditation process without increasing bureaucracy.
<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of “standards” for quality criteria. • Regional autonomy may integrate incongruity or incompatibility among regional accreditation processes which may restrain mutual recognition of VET providers at national level. • From VET providers’ perspective, accreditation seems to be a funding matter rather than a quality assurance matter. • Demands from the Regions seem to increase costs (i.e. managerial, HR costs, etc). • The model and its quality assurance procedures do not encourage or are not used as a tool for further improvements beyond the minimum standards/level required. • The system seems to favour SME’s rather than large companies’ interests. • The system is complex. • The model does not incorporate courses/programmes quality assessment.

Table 2: results of the feedback of the participants on the Italian accreditation system, drafted by ENQA-VET Secretariat

3.c. Transfer

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁷ mentioned the following added value that they could use:

<p><i>What has been the added-value of your participation in terms of your personal learning?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information on Italian model (6x)• International insights, useful contacts (4x)• Understanding the importance of accreditation• Clarification of concepts• Information on VET in other countries
<p><i>What has been the added-value of your participation in terms of the professional context in which you are working?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information and knowledge on VET in other countries (4x)• Relation our model with the others (4x)• Knowledge on strengths and weaknesses of the Italian model (3x)• How to maintain quality in the whole spectrum of the VET institution
<p><i>What insights have you gained that you feel be useful to a wider audience of your peers at regional and/or national level?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal framework, tools and methodology used in Italy (3x)• Different focus of accreditation (on the organisation) (2x)• Monitoring accreditation• Mainly criteria for evaluation• The amount of work this system requires• Accreditation must be processes, procedures and content• The relation of accreditation with the local context• That problems and solutions may have different weight regard to how big (or small) is the country.• That sometimes the processes and benefits of quality assurance in VET are not clear or considered in the context of qualifications framework.• That strive to improvement can't come through more thorough regulations but through (positive) motivation.

Table 3: Added value of the PLA

⁷ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

3.d. European added value

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁸ mentioned the following European added value:

<p><i>What do you consider to be the specific European added-value of the peer learning activity?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• International debate and inspiration, exchange of views (5x)• Contribution to the development of common ideas, mutual understanding (3x)• Focus on three levels: European, national, regional
<p><i>What insights have you gained which will be used to a wider audience at European Level?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Italian system, including the role of the regions (2x)• Cedefop study and conference on accreditation• Make further comparisons• That sometimes the processes and benefits of quality assurance in VET are not clear or considered in the context of qualifications framework.• That strive to improvement can't come through more thorough regulations but through (positive) motivation.

Table 4: European added value of the PLA

4. Process

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁹ mentioned the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

<p><i>What were the main strengths of the PLA management and organization?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good preparations from ISFOL (both facilities and content). (3x)• Well chosen expert who fulfilled his role very well (3x)• Diversity of speakers (2x)• Very good materials sent in advance – good questionnaire, good practical information, very good location of event.• Focus on one aspect and go through this (2x)• Plus side is certainly pre-PLA questionnaire and collaborative analysis of that.• Presentations-discussions-visits is a good working model.• Very good presentations by social partners• I was (positively) surprised that (almost) everything happened in time.• Honesty of the Italians.• Visit to two different schools

Table 5: Strengths of the PLA process

⁸ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

⁹ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

Weaknesses

What were the main weaknesses of the PLA management and organization?

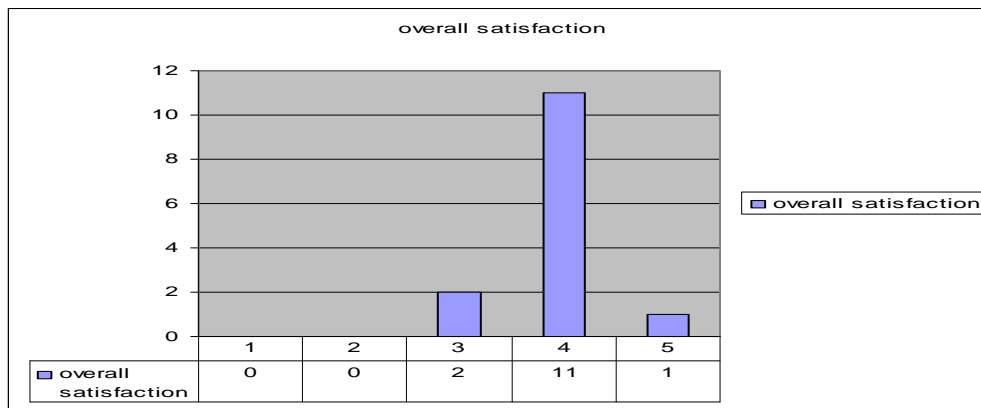
- Not enough time for the group work on national experiences (4x)
- Too much information, too little time for reflection (4x)
- Presentations in Italian, especially presentations in Italian and without slides (2x)
- Too many contributions, program too heavy and tiring (2x)
- Better preparation of the first VET provider
- Too many interruptions on Monday
- Too much time for trafficking to the schools

Table 6: Weaknesses of the PLA process

5. Conclusion

5.a. Process

The process of the PLA in general can be considered to be successful.



5.b. Expected impact

The PLA will have an impact on national levels. The participants mention several ways of disseminating the experiences and knowledge that they have gathered.

<p><i>How will your experiences / learning during the PLA be disseminated to a wider audience within the system in which you are working?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reporting (8x)• Newsletter• Meetings• No
<p><i>What contribution will your participation in the PLA enable you to make to policy development in your country?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation in (further) developing the QA system (3x)• Use the strengths of this Italian system for our criteria (3x)• Influence further (national) discussion (3x)• No
<p><i>What contribution will your participation in the PLA enable you to make to policy implementation in your country?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not sure (2x)• How things are done in other countries (2x)• Start discussing with colleagues, involvement of social partners (2x)• Influence further implementation• No

Table 8: National impact

The impact on European level is more unlikely. Only five participants answered. Furthermore it has to be considered that many important European players were not attending (e.g. France, Spain and Germany).

<p><i>How has the PLA contributed to a common body of knowledge at European level that will enhance the quality assurance aspects of accreditation ?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not know (2x)• Sharing experiences is a good opportunity to improve• Clarifying some concepts about this concept• I think that majority (or at least significant proportion) of the participated countries (representatives) agreed that accreditation, which focuses only/mainly to organisational quality is not enough to assure the quality of VET. Also the content and training process needs to be evaluated (maintained by feedback). Of course, countries have their specific stresses/highlights in the QA processes regard to their' context.• In order to ensure comparability of qualifications and support mobility, a transparent procedure of accreditation is needed in all countries.

Table 9: European impact

6. Policy recommendations

6.a. Process

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants¹⁰ mentioned the following suggestions for improvement:

<i>What do you think would assist in further improving the PLA?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better time management (3x) • Everyone to speak English (3x) • Better preparation of the VET providers • Not enough involvement of teachers/trainers in visits • More interaction during the sessions • PLA about drop out in the VET-system • More balance between presentations from the host and participants discussions • Substantial preliminary report on the theme • Everybody should stay until the end

Table 10: Suggestions for improvement of the PLA process

6. b. Subject

The discussions on the subject lead to two observations synthesized by the expert: the dichotomy of accountability and improvement and the co-occurrence of input-output-throughput process and content.

6.b.1. Accountability and improvement

Using the description model for external assessment (Van Kemenade, 2009) a two-way-system of quality assurance could be designed:

	External Quality Management System	Internal Quality Management System
<i>Function</i>	Accountability Mandatory	Improvement Voluntary
<i>Object</i>	Institution, Quality Management System	Process (e.g. educational program)
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<i>Subject</i>	Professional auditors	Peers
<i>Values</i>	Control	Continuous improvement en commitment

Table 11 : Two way system of quality assurance

¹⁰ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

6.b.2. Process and content

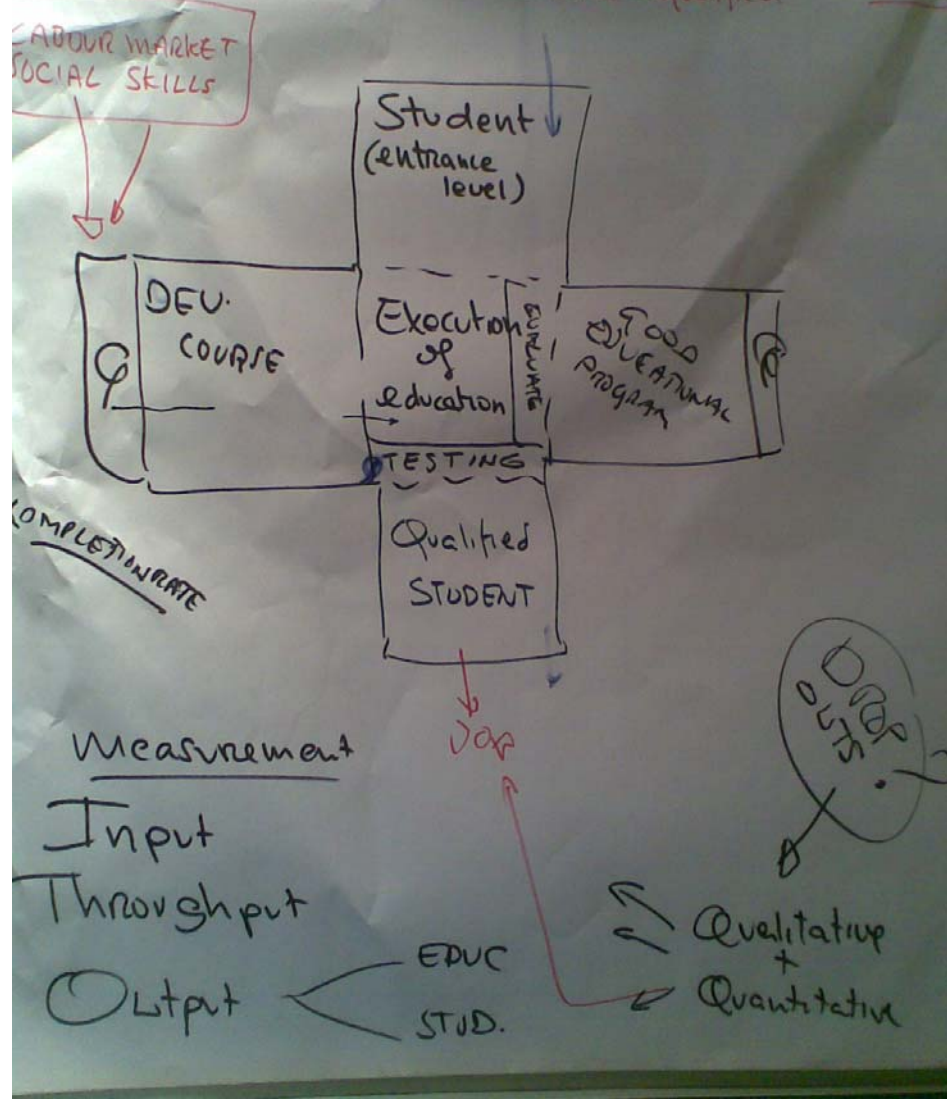
A quality assurance system should refer to processes. You can think of the input-throughput-output of students, including the testing leading to a qualified student. It is the process of entrance- added value and qualification of the student towards a job.

But also the quality assurance should focus on the content, the course. That is: the development of a course, the execution and evaluation leading to a good educational program. The qualifications here are at the beginning as well as at the end (and in between).

The measurement should be quantitative as well as qualitative.

As shown in the photo the two systems cross.

- PROCESSES
1. development - execution - evaluation COURSE
 2. entrance - added value - qualified STUDENT



References

- Kemenade, E.A. van, Pupius M. and Hardjono, T.W. *More value to defining quality. Quality in Higher Education*, 14, 2, pp.175-178
- Kemenade, E.A. van, *Peer Learning Activity on Accreditation. Report on pre-activity questionnaires*, May 12nd 2009.
- Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009
- ENQA-VET *Guidelines for PLA reports*
- Technical Working Group *'Quality in VET' Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET in Europe*, 11/06/2004

Appendix *Peer learning activity on Accreditation of VET providers*
Ministry of Labour/ISFOL

Rome, 27 - 29 April 2009

Monday, April 27 Sala CDA ISFOL

Via G.B. Morgagni 33 Rome

09:15 Welcome by Ministry of Labour (L. Scarpitti – Head of the department for Guidance and Training for young people employability) and Isfol (G. Principe - General Director).

09:30 Aim of the PLA and short presentation of Italian VET system (E. van Kemenade – ENQA-VET Expert – G. Allulli – Vicechairperson of ENQA-VET Board and Coordinator of Italian National Reference Point)

09:45 Accreditation as a strategic tool of the Italian Vet system quality improvement policy: (L. Scarpitti - Ministry of Labour; Angelo Panvini – Ministry of Education – Inspector; M. Prodi – Regione Umbria - Assessor)

10:30 Discussion

11:00 Coffee break

11:15 Reflection session one: What is accreditation and what do I want from these three days (E. van Kemenade)

11:45 The Italian VET providers accreditation model: Claudia Montedoro-Head of Accreditation Department - Isfol

12:15 Discussion

12:45 Presentation of the accreditation model of Regione Lazio (M.Camponeschi-Regione Lazio)

13:30 Lunch Hotel Villa Morgagni

Pomeriggio

14:30 Reflection session two: Outcomes and Issues emerging from other countries: the results of the questionnaire (E. van Kemenade)

15:15 Transfer to an Italian VET provider (Centro Engim)

15:30 Systems for quality assurance and the impact of accreditation on a Vet provider (Centro Engim)

16:30 Reflection session three: Lessons learned, questions for tomorrow (E. van Kemenade)

17:30 End

Tuesday, April 28 Hotel villa Morgagni

Via G.B. Morgagni 29 Rome

- 9:00 The implementation of the accreditation model by Italian Regions: the main outcomes of the past experience. V.Ruggeri - Researcher in Accreditation Department - Isfol
- 9:20 Indicators for accreditation: efficiency and effectiveness. M.De Minicis - Researcher in Accreditation Department - Isfol
- 9.40 Discussion
- 10:30 *Coffee break*
- 11:00 Planning and implementation of the Accreditation model at regional level, with a focus on the procedures for control: the case of Regione Piemonte (L. Albert – Director of Vet Department Regione Piemonte)
- 11:20 Planning and implementation of the Accreditation model at regional level, with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness criteria: the case of Regione Veneto (S. Romano – Director of Training department – Regione Veneto)
- 11:40 Discussion
- 12:20 Reflection session four: How do we look like if we hold ourselves against the indicators? (E. van Kemenade)
- 13:20 Lunch Hotel Villa Morgagni
- 14: 30 Transfer to an Italian VET provider (Centro Elis)
- 15:00 Systems for quality assurance and the impact of accreditation on a Vet provider (Centro Elis)
- 16.30 Reflection session five: Lessons learned and questions for tomorrow (E. van Kemenade)
- 17:30 End
- 19:30 Social Event organized by Isfol

Wednesday, April 29 Hotel villa Morgagni

- 09:00* The role of other stakeholders: the involvement of social partners in quality assurance and accreditation (T. Grandi, CGIL, and S. Ciuffini, responsible for labour market and VET, Confartigianato)
- 09:45* Discussion
- 10:30* Coffee break
- 10:45* General feedback from participants about Italian model: strengthens and weaknesses (G.Allulli and C.Montedoro)
- 11:30* Reflection session six: Give each other feedback (E. van Kemenade)
- 12.45* Synthesis (E. van Kemenade)
- 13.15* Evaluation (E. van Kemenade)
- 13:30* Buffet lunch