



ENQA-VET

European Network for Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

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.

REPORT OF THE
PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY

Quality assurance labels for VET

A request for more

ENQA-VET Peer Learning Activity
Paris 23rd- 30th November 2009

Everard van Kemenade, ENQA-VET Expert
December 2009

Content

0. **Foreword**, wherein the objective of the PLA is mentioned.
1. An **Executive Summary** and **key recommendations** for policy makers at European level, national level, regional level, provider level and system Level.
2. An **Introduction**, which should include:
 - a) The policy context and how the PLA fits within it (i.e. the Lisbon strategy, Copenhagen process, quality assurance and the ENQA-VET work programme).
 - b) An introduction, in which PLA's rationale is explained.
 - c) Explain the importance of the particular PLA's theme in relation to the policy context.
3. **Content** part of the report. Which should include :
 - 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** part of the report. This includes 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. The target public should be those working at a policy development and implementation level at European, national, system and provider level.

References

O. Foreword

From 23rd till 25th of November 2009 the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on Quality Labels took place in Paris.

Eleven participants from different European countries took part, besides some representatives of the French host. The participants were member of national VET-(QA)-organisations in The Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, Rumania, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Finland, Malta. The French Ministry of Education was host, Everard van Kemenade was the expert. Austria, Luxembourg (IVET), Norway (accreditation technical management VET) and Romania (Quality mark" for training firms") have experience in labellisation.

Based on findings of the host and expert added with the results of the pre-PLA questionnaire¹ 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.

Central issue in the PLA has been the two French labels for VET: the "Label Lycée des Métiers" and the so called GRETA+-label. (GRETA is a group of educational institutes for adult education in France).

¹ See: Van Kemenade, E.A. Report on pre-activity questionnaires Peer Learning Activity on Quality assurance labels for VET November 17th 2009.

1. Executive summary

From 23rd till 25th of November 2009 the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on Quality Labels took place in Paris.

Eleven participants from eleven European countries took part, besides some representatives of the French host. The participants were member of national VET-(QA)-organizations in The Netherlands, Slovenia, Estonia, Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Rumania, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Finland, Malta. The French Ministry of Education was host, Everard van Kemenade was the expert.

A quality label can be an instrument to assure confidence in the quality of an institution. Accreditation is not mentioned in the French system. In the CQAF 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 States. 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).* France has an experience in labels of VET since 1999. This long term experience can be of significant value for other countries. Furthermore the French system itself is open for reform and could make use of the feedback of a European group of experts like gathered in a PLA. The line between quality labels and certification or accreditation is thin. Labellisation, certification or accreditation could become instruments to assure confidence of the quality of VET in Europe. In doing so they could contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives by providing effective vocational education and training. In the end they could enforce the mobility of learners and workers throughout Europe, provided some sort of mutual recognition of systems.

The process of the PLA in general can be considered to be successful. In the evaluation (5 out of 11 respondent) all gave positive feedback. The other six people that did not respond however could have had bad experiences, although that has not been visible.

Suggestions for improvement were focused mainly on more interactivity (2), less time (1) or more time for discussions (1) and use of English as PLA-language (1x).

The discussions on the subject lead to an observation by the expert: the tension between national and European systems. The French system originates and has been developed on national grounds, history and experiences. The GRETA+ adds to that the experiences of AFNOR², related to

² **AFNOR** is an **international services delivery network** that revolves around **4 core competency areas: standardisation, certification, industry press, and training.**

ISO. The French system has improved since its departure. Now ways are sought to measure outcomes and really get people involved on all levels. These are European, maybe even worldwide issues. European dialogue on these –as was done in the PLA- is crucial for both parties.

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 approach³ was endorsed by the Council, which invited both Member States and the

³ See: Technical Working Group 'Quality in VET' *Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET in Europe*, 11/06/2004

Commission to promote it through practical initiatives involving the relevant stakeholders, on a voluntary basis.

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, labellisation, certification can be instruments to assure confidence in the quality of an institution.

France has its own history and experience in quality labels of VET since 1999. This long term experience can be of significant value for other countries. Furthermore the French 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

Labelling and accreditation could become instruments 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 systems.

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:

Learning from good-practice
I hope that I will get ideas for QA, which could be applied in our VET schools
I will share my experiences with my colleagues from CSI and my students of school management.
Obviously through better understanding helps to develop QA policy in Estonia too.
It is important to have more background information on the usefulness of labellisation in quality assurance of VET and on the activities of VET providers in the quality management.
The PLA can make understand better: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- If implementation of labelling is feasible also in different contexts- What is the impact on the providers
Promoting the quality of the measures that will be implemented in a near future
Policy development and policy implementation can and should be an integral part of the planning and control cycle within the school organisation. It would be interesting to exchange views on how policy development and implementation is related to –and fitted in- the planning and control cycle.
All ideas and reports from best practices collected in the PLA may contribute to the policy development and implementation. The time for this is excellent since we are discussing Quality Assurance Systems in Norway.
Get more knowledge about VET quality systems in Europe is useful to be able to participate in discussions and to be involved in influencing the positive VET development in Norway.
Introduction of a labellisation system might increase the involvement of teachers, students and employers in VET quality improvement.
Because we are at the developing the strategy for introducing quality labels in VET, it will be very good to see how other countries developed labellisation.

Table 1 Issues raised

In the PLA these objectives have been SMARTened⁴ in an short individual session and the participants each made a drawing to make their expectations visible. The French case provided a lot of insights and e.g. the following issues for debate:

- Difference between Lycée des Métiers and GRETA+;
- Use of standardisation (organisations);
- Input-throughput-output measurements
- Improvement & control

3.b. Key findings

Areas for improvement

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

STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Clearly articulated system	The word "label" is misleading and might have a negative connotation in other countries than France.
Dialogue as base for development	
Label gives a sense for direction.	Let us not forget classical education: students in VET are not there just for gaining professional skills they are there also for gaining personal development in general education.
VET is on the national agenda	
People and money are invested	
Networking with all stakeholders	This is about a minimum level for everyone, not about excellence.
Step by step approach	The label is the start of the quality process.
Continuous improvement approach	Communicate on the labels.
Development GRETA+ based on and together with standardisation organisation	Consider the use of self evaluation.
	Dialogue with EU partners and EQARF, ECVET, with respect for the differences.
	Make texts available in English.

Table 2: Strengths and areas for improvement of the French labelling system

Label and accreditation.

As it is used in France the two labels (Lycée des Métiers et GRETA+) are not a form of accreditation. They are not mandatory. Having a label in place, especially when it is voluntary and focused on minimum level, has a risk. Schools that have the label seem to be the ones working on quality

⁴ Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound

improvement. Schools that are not involved are proposed not to be caring much about their performance.

If an accreditation system is in place that is mandatory and takes care of assuring the minimum level, labels or awards could play a role of a model – excellence, best practice or maximum standard. In other countries' policies like Estonia the EFQM-model is used for that purpose.

Accreditation and the professional

On the other hand in an accreditation system that is mandatory and that has serious consequences, professionals will be careful in writing down the truth, expressing their weaknesses and showing their vulnerability. That is a serious drawback, especially in education. Kelchtermans (2005) states that *"the basis structure in vulnerability is always one of feeling that one's professional identity and moral integrity, as part of being 'a proper teacher' are questioned and that valued workplace conditions are thereby threatened or lost"* But: *"On the other hand it is this inescapable vulnerability that ultimately constitutes the very possibility for teachers 'to educate' and to teach in a way that really makes a difference in students' lives". This vulnerability is an essential dimension in education.* This leads to the conclusion that, although almost every accreditation system in Europe uses self-evaluation as the first step in its methodology, writing a self study should be limited to a voluntary act in an improvement process, instead of a mandatory activity in a control system. In general it would be preferable to separate accountability measures from improvement, again unlike many accreditation systems that claim to have both functions in one (Van Kemenade, 2009)

3.c. Transfer

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁵ mentioned the following added value that they could use:

<p>What has been the added-value of your participation in terms of your personal learning?</p> <p><i>It has influenced my professional experience in VET QA sector in no small way.</i></p> <p><i>Not only did I learn about French education but also I could see the differences in comparison with our education system, what made me think of strengths and (possible) weaknesses in our own system. Nice company of old and new friends.</i></p>
<p>What has been the added-value of your participation in terms of the professional context in which you are working?</p> <p><i>Concrete information on French labels. I learned about a system so much of which I was ignorant.</i></p> <p><i>Putting my own world in a broader context and enlarging my professional network.</i></p> <p><i>I learned e.g. that in evaluations attention can be paid in different areas and functions. In Finland emphasis is on outcomes of education. I realized that the areas mentioned in France are important and have also influence on results to be gained.</i></p> <p><i>A more clear view of the importance of context, visibility and step by step development of QA.</i></p>

Table 4: Added value of the PLA

⁵ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

They gained the following insights:

<p>What insights have you gained that you feel be useful to a wider audience of your peers at regional and/or national level?</p> <p><i>Label Lycée des Métiers and Greta+ label</i></p> <p><i>The importance to have true input from all parties concerned.</i></p> <p><i>Clarity of presenting your system and stay committed to what one believes in.</i></p> <p><i>I need to discuss with my workmates about having a closer co-work with our VET providers, who manage the institutions autonomously, but following law, acts, requirements of qualifications etc. (Are they "left alone"?)</i></p> <p><i>Visibility of labels is very important; small and big countries have different approaches.</i></p>

Table 5: Insights of the PLA

3.d. European added value or new knowledge

<p>What insights have you gained which will be used to a wider audience at European Level?</p> <p><i>The fact to set a framework, not an instrument for control.</i></p> <p><i>Here I just refer to EQF and ECVET systems. There is a lot to do before those systems will be implemented in most of European countries.</i></p> <p><i>To take into consideration all VET structures and systems.</i> <i>To extend the dialogue on VET issues without prejudice and with a critical attitude.</i></p> <p><i>The context of a country is unique and therefore it is not possible to measure the same for everybody using the same model.</i></p> <p><i>Cooperation, comparison, peer feedback at least across the Europe is very useful.</i></p>
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Table 6: European added value

The PLA in Paris stressed the importance of European co-operation. An issue of discussion was the differences between countries and the learning possibilities of what has been achieved on European level. The French labels so far have been developed without using much of the European systems and instruments like EQARF.

4. Process

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁶ mentioned the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

<p>What were the main strengths of the PLA management and organization?</p> <p><i>Hospitality, meals, competence of speakers.</i></p> <p><i>The quality of subjects, agenda, wonderful premises.</i></p> <p><i>Excellence!</i></p> <p><i>The program was many-sided and well organized. All important information concerning PLA (seminar) was available beforehand. Especially, the visits made in the institutions meant added value.</i></p> <p><i>Content, its presentation, excellent translation and hosting.</i></p> <p><i>Experts work was excellent! The hosts prepare very good content of PLA.</i></p>

Table 5: Strengths of the PLA process

Weaknesses

<p>What were the main weaknesses of the PLA management and organization?</p> <p><i>Better shorter meetings e.g. a maximum of two days.</i></p> <p><i>Maybe more time for discussions would have been welcomed.</i></p> <p><i>All themes included in the program were important, but concentrating more deeply but not with so many presentations on the main themes would have been for the participants a bit easier to master.</i></p> <p><i>Effects of too much very good food 😊!</i></p>
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Table 6: Weaknesses of the PLA process

⁶ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Accreditation 27th-29th April 2009 in Rome. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, 12th of May 2009

5. Conclusion

5.a. Process

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

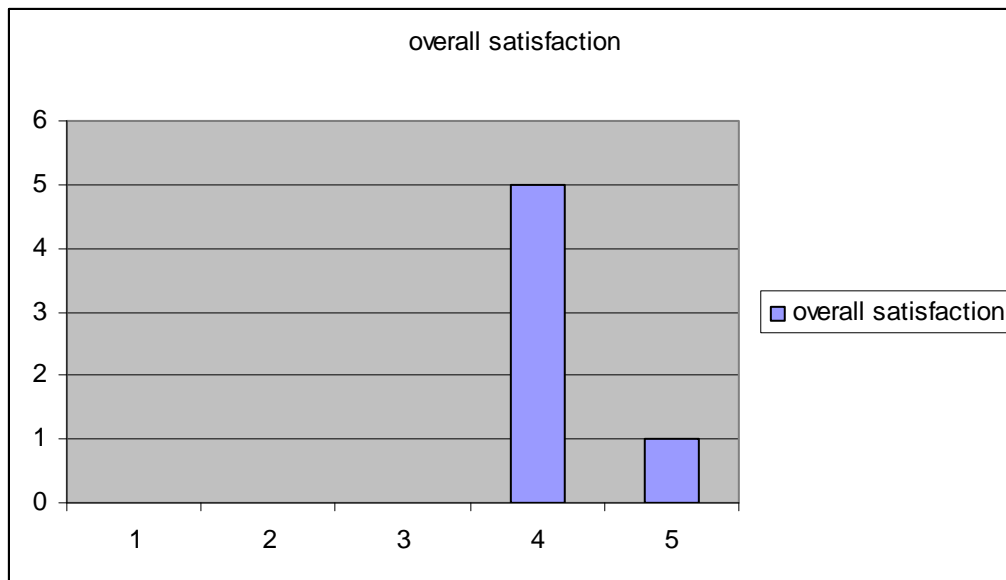


Table 7: overall satisfaction
(from 1 very unsatisfied to 5 very satisfied)

However, only six out of eleven people responded to the questionnaire.

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>How will your experiences / learning during the PLA be disseminated to a wider audience within the system in which you are working?</p> <p><i>By meetings inside my department.</i></p> <p><i>I will draft an extensive report.</i></p> <p><i>I shall summarize all I have heard and learned through email to all our staff and Ministry.</i></p> <p><i>With this experience I am more competent in taking part in discussions, although I cannot see my contribution in policy development remarkable. Surely, it has opened my eyes to see more widely the quality assurance methods. All new knowledge is important in planning and assessing developing projects of VET providers.</i></p>

Table 8: National impact

6. Policy recommendations

6.a. Process

In the post-activity questionnaire the participants⁷ mentioned the following suggestions for improvement:

<p>What do you think would assist in further improving the PLA?</p> <p><i>More working groups, distribution of paper/documents in advance.</i></p> <p><i>I would be interested in participating in a seminar where one (or more) topic is presented by representatives from different countries, a topic to be compared with each other.</i></p> <p><i>Keep our contacts alive.</i></p> <p><i>At first: continue with PLA's on a similar way in every aspect.</i></p>

Table 10: Suggestions for improvement of the PLA process

6. b. Subject

The French label is voluntary, many countries are developing accreditation systems. How are these related and what can be learned from that? Based on the PLA in Rome and this PLA in Sèvres the following policy recommendation can be made: it would be preferable for any country to separate accountability measures from improvement. That is unlike many accreditation systems e.g. in European Higher Education that claim to have both functions in one. Van Kemenade (2009) argues a "Two way system on intelligent accountability ©" for Higher Education and VET in Europe (in fact for every education quality management system in the world). He suggests to separate internal and external assessment. Accreditation takes care of the minimum standard and control. Labels or awards could take care of excellence, benchmarking and continuous improvement. And although almost every accreditation system in Europe uses self-evaluation as the first step in its methodology, writing a self study should be limited to a voluntary act in an improvement process instead of a mandatory activity in a control system to prevent window dressing and dramaturgical compliance. Labels and awards can be a valuable part of the improvement oriented internal assessment. Like in France external auditors could be used for that purpose. The lessons we can learn from the French system and the areas for

⁷ Van Kemenade, E. A. *PLA Quality Labels 23^d -25th November 2009 in Paris. Results of the post activity questionnaire for Participants*, December 2nd 2009

improvement mentioned in chapter 3b. fit more into the right column of the table, although the French label focuses on the minimum level.

	External assessment	"Internal" assessment
<i>Function</i>	Accountability audit	Improvement audit
	Compulsory	Voluntary
<i>Object</i>	Institution	Program
<i>Basic rules</i>	External minimal standards	Fitness for purpose (the organisation sets its own standards) or benchmark for excellence (award or label).
<i>Stakeholders</i>	All, but mainly the government	All, but mainly the student and world of work
<i>Organisation</i>	Governmental	The institution itself, using external stakeholders
<i>Methodology</i>	Document analysis (including management review) Performance indicators Site visit Inspection Accreditation decision	Self evaluation report Site visit Dialogue Improvement plan
<i>Subject</i>	Professional auditors	Peers
<i>Values</i>	Control <i>Distrust</i>	Continuous improvement and commitment <i>Confiance, mutual trust</i>

Table 3: Two way system of intelligent accountability ©.

The outcome of this PLA and the one in Rome could contribute to (discussion on) the development of a VET-two way system. In Higher Education in Europe the Bologna process and developments within the EU-member countries concerning accreditation make it not feasible to have such a crucial and fundamental discussion on the quality assurance system. In a sense it seems to be too late.

Regarding the subject a discussion within European VET should be held on the relation between labels, awards and accreditation within a country and between countries. The European discussion on quality in VET should continue.

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