

VET-CERT



Recommendations related to quality assurance and certification for the implementation of the curricular framework “quality management in vocational education and training”

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Certification Concept

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Qualifizierung als Weg zur Qualität: Zertifizierung von Personen mit Funktionen innerhalb von Qualitätsmanagementsystemen in der beruflichen Erstausbildung sowie in der Erwachsenenbildung.

Qualification as a way to quality: Certification of persons holding functions in quality management systems in initial VET and in adult education



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1. STARTING POINT, OBJECTIVES, MODEL CONSIDERATIONS

As part of the VET-CERT project¹, which was initiated as a two-year EU project with the goal of the professionalisation of quality managers in VET and CVET, a curricular framework for the programme “Quality management in vocational education and training”² was developed. It builds on the competence profiles for quality managers in the Austrian vocational education and training (VET) school system, which were elaborated in a first development step. The programme addresses people whose work involves - or who in the future want to deal with - issues related to quality assurance and development in school-based VET. In particular it addresses the specific requirements of quality managers at school and regional level.

A programme with a focus on quality management is, of course, especially required to assure and develop its own quality. For this purpose, the VET-CERT project has - from the beginning - foreseen the development of a relevant concept in addition to the curricular framework. This document summarises these considerations as recommendations for quality assurance and certification for the implementation of the curricular framework “Quality management in vocational education and training”.³

The concept was developed in the course of two meetings of the development team⁴ which is also elaborating the curricular framework: on 23 May and 8 October 2012 in Vienna and in the course of a project workshop in Steyr on 4 July 2012.

The objectives of this current concept mainly comprise the following aspects:

- **Quality assurance**
One major goal of these recommendations is the outlining of a procedure to ensure the quality of the planned programme, such as by external accreditation of the programme.
- **Professionalisation**
The curricular framework lays down learning outcomes and competences which guarantee professional quality assurance and development in school-based VET. Certification of these competences aims to contribute to the professionalisation of the work of quality managers at school, regional and federal level and provide a “quality label” (visible distinction) for graduates of the programme.
- **Further training**
Certification and especially recertification aim to ensure that the graduates of the programme “Quality management in vocational education and training” are obliged to take part in CET measures on a regular basis.

¹ Cf. <http://www.vet-cert.at> (15.10.2012).

² Proinger, Eva, Markowitsch Jörg und Luomi-Messerer, Karin (2012): *Rahmencurriculum ‘Qualitätsmanagement in der Berufsbildung’*, 3s, Vienna.

³ Recognition of already acquired learning outcomes or competences is not the topic of this concept, cf. item 2.2 and Annex I in “Curricular framework ‘Quality management in vocational education and training’”.

⁴ The members of the development team are listed in Annex III of the curricular framework.

2. STRUCTURE AND ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSED PROCEDURE

Two different proposals for models to achieve the above objectives can be identified based on related discussions:

- On the one hand, there is the idea of a type of programme “accreditation” which foresees that an external organisation, such as a public authority, accredits the corresponding programme. For this purpose, recommendations on the implementation quality would have to be created, which the authority could use as guidance.
- On the other hand, there is the model of the “certification” of persons which foresees that an external organisation issues a certificate either based on the proof of the final certificate of the respective programme or based on additional competence assessments; this certificate proves that the candidates have acquired the related competences, it would be valid for 4-5 years and suggests a related recertification.

Based on these preliminary considerations, the recommendations specified here now foresee a *combination of the two procedures*, where classic programme accreditation is replaced with a quality audit conducted in the course of an application for subsidies/funding submitted to the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) and where certification is linked to the final certificate of the programme (without any additional external audit). The recommended procedure can be roughly outlined as follows:

1. A body which still needs to be set up and authorised by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) examines the application for subsidies of an educational provider for the following items at least:
 - a) conformity of the future programme with the curricular framework
 - b) composition and qualification of the programme team
 - c) procedures to safeguard quality (or suggestions for improvement measures in the course of prolongation)
2. A successful audit is the prerequisite for any funding of the programme by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) (in line with the budget) and additionally enables the provider to promise future graduates, as well as a final certificate, a certificate which certifies that they have acquired the competences required to carry out the task of school quality process manager (SQPM) and regional quality process manager (LQPM) (for example “quality manager in the VET school system” (working title).
3. Subsidisation and the promise that this certificate will be issued will be for the duration of the programme. In the course of a renewed application, the provider will be obliged to submit a self-evaluation report of the programme including suggestions of improvement measures.
4. The programme provider also agrees that one person (“peer”) nominated by the competent body will take part in the final examinations.
5. The peer will send the competent body a recommendation about issuing the certificate to graduates. Together with the self-evaluation report, this recommendation forms the basis for the decision on further subsidies/the possible awarding of the certification.
6. The certificate will be issued at the same time the final certificate is awarded. The certificate will be valid for four years.

7. Recertification, the issuing of a new certificate for another four years, will be possible based on proof of relevant continuing training amounting to 2 ECTS.

The possibility of awarding the “external certificate” is not dependent on any financial support for the programme from the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) but the prerequisite is, by all means, the examination of the application by the competent body.

In brief, therefore, the procedure provides for the following elements, which will be outlined in more detail below:

- Preliminary audit of the programme based on an *application* and using clear *quality criteria* by an *independent body*
- Participation of *peers* in final examinations
- *External certificate* (proof of competence linked to successful completion of the programme)
- *Recertification* (linked to participation in further training).

This suggestion attempts to take account of a number of contextual factors in a pragmatic way, such as the autonomy of universities and universities of applied sciences in the establishment and quality assurance of university courses and further training courses, the little experience in the school system with the external certification of individuals, or the little experience of university colleges of education with external programme accreditation. By changing these factors, however, the procedure should be adjusted as well, for example it might be more realistic in future to conduct external competence identification independent of the programme. Keeping this in mind, this suggestion is meant to be a first starting point in a longer-term development.

3. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS

3.1 Recertification

Recertification aims to encourage regular participation in further training measures by people who are active as school quality process managers (SQPMs) or regional quality process managers (LQPMs). The certificate “Quality manager in the VET school system” (working title) can be prolonged in accordance with the valid certification conditions by another 4 years if the following are submitted with timely submission of the application (such as 2 months before expiry and 6 months following expiry of the validity of the certificate)

- a written application
- with proof of still valid occupational practice and
- proof of further training (“refreshing”) amounting to 2 ECTS

For this objective, the body which is also competent for certification keeps a list of further training measures which are suited/recommended as evidence (cf. also the suggested further training modules in the curricular framework).

3.2 Application by education provider

The application by the education provider should comprise at least the following elements:

1. Curriculum with information about
 - Target groups
 - Access requirements and admission
 - Procedures for the recognition of previous knowledge and experience
 - Educational concept
 - Examination regulation
 - Studies/modular structure
 - Detailed information (content, ECTS, etc.) about the individual units

This section should also make explicit references to the recommended curricular framework and reveal the differences to it and state reasons.

2. Faculty team
 - Proof of qualification of programme management
 - Proof of qualification of teachers (including CVs in the EU format)
 - Cooperation of programme team
3. Quality assurance
 - Concept of internal quality assurance at programme level
 - Integration of internal quality assurance in institutional quality assurance
 - Self-evaluation report and suggestions of improvement measures (in case of renewed application)
4. Organisation
 - Planned number of study places
 - Financing concept
 - Schedule (programme start, time of units and final exam)

3.3 Requirements for the external body

The body which carries out the preliminary audit of the planned programmes and should also be responsible for the cooperation agreement with the providers concerning the issuing of the additional certificate to graduates should at least meet the following requirements. It should

- be independent and not affiliated to any political party;
- have specialist qualifications and, for example, count the VET Quality Initiative QIBB among its core tasks;
- not be an individual but ideally a body/jury;
- the body/jury should also include external experts (persons who do not come from the field of schooling).

3.4 Quality criteria

The quality criteria, which must be developed in detail by the external body, to assess applications should be oriented towards the points specified in the following. The individual criteria have not been weighted in any way or differentiated as to which of them are knock-out criteria. This list can therefore also be seen merely as a suggestion and does not claim to be complete or final.

1. Conformity with the curricular framework

- Are all key competences/contents taught?
- Is the workload at least 12 ECTS?
- Are Modules 1, 2 & 5 completely covered?
- Are Modules 3 and 4 at least largely covered?
- Are the descriptions of units available in the form of learning outcomes?

2. Composition and qualifications of the programme team

- Has the programme management gathered experience with the VET Quality Initiative QIBB?
- Does the programme management have relevant specialist academic and scientific qualifications?
- Has the programme management gathered experience with the management of comparable programmes?
- Does the programme team comprise at least six teachers?
- Have most of the proposed teachers been employed? (Question in the course of evaluation)
- Have at least one third of the teachers gathered experience with the VET Quality Initiative QIBB?
- Have the teachers in the units which correspond to Modules 1 and 2 gathered experience with the VET Quality Initiative QIBB?
- Are at least one third of the teachers not part of the Austrian VET school system?
- Do teachers have appropriate competences related to didactics and adult education?
- Are academic and scientific qualifications sufficiently represented in the programme team?
- Is the gender distribution in the programme team balanced?

3. Quality assurance

- Has an evaluation of the programme already been planned?
- Does programme evaluation include a participant survey?
- Does programme evaluation include a teacher survey?
- How is the implementation of improvement measures ensured?

3.5 The certificate

Unlike the final certificate of the programme, which usually contains an overall assessment and, if applicable, individual assessments broken down by units or modules, the recommended additional certificate “Quality manager in the VET school system” (working title) certifies competences which entitle holders to professionally engage in the work of school quality process managers and regional quality process managers. Another difference is that the certificate is only valid for four years and would then have to be renewed (see above). The external body must provide the programme providers with a relevant standardised pre-printed form based on a cooperation agreement.

The importance of this certificate will depend on the general acceptance and form of implementation and will therefore require appropriate PR work (see recommendations below).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUGGESTED CONCEPT

4.1 The role of principals

Principals play a key role in ensuring the success of the suggested concept. In appointments to positions, for example, principals can give preference to candidates with a certificate over those without a certificate and clearly state they follow this procedure in the HRD concept, calls for tenders and the quality report.

4.2 Enhancing visibility

It is important to give the certificate a standardised form to ensure recognition. It should by all means be designed attractively so that holders like to exhibit it. This should also be proposed by the programme provider, the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, the school inspectorate and principals. In addition, the programme and results can be promoted in the form of the prepared poster presentation, for example, such as by exhibiting the project poster in the school.

4.3 Advertising and promotion

The existing structures and networks should be used in the best possible way for promotion purposes. As well as the possibilities offered by ARQA-VET (such as newsletters, annual quality conference), these can include regional meetings of quality managers or also (further) training of principals, for example.

In this connection, but going beyond the objective of this concept, the great importance of network formation and the possibilities of exchanges between participants and graduates outside the training programme should also be mentioned. Participants are frequently motivated to form networks due to their experience gathered in the training. But it will not always be possible to translate this motivation into specific activities. It would therefore be important to develop a separate concept of how this community building could work. Also here it is decisive that the required resources are safeguarded.

www.vet-cert.at

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