



# IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND MONITORING OF BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

## WORKSHOP ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ADULT EDUCATION - MINUTES

Utrecht, 3 October 2019

### 1. Workshop participants

Speakers: **Mr Hans Hindriks** (Project Manager; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands), **Ms Glenda Quintini** (Senior Economist/Policy Analyst; OECD).

National Experts: **Ms Sabine Püskül** (Project Coordination, Ö-Cert-Geschäftsstelle), **Ms Astri Pestalozzi** (Senior Advisor, Skills Norway), **Ms Jasmina Orešnik Cunja** (Senior Advisor, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education), **Mr Wouter Heijne** (Quality Advisor, Friesland College), **Ms Elwine Halewijn** (Director for Adult Education, Institute for Language Research and Language Education, Amsterdam).

Participants: Representatives of Dutch local governments (approximately 25-35 participants)

### 2. Overall goals

The workshop was convened to serve as a (peer-to-peer) forum for promoting the exchange of good practices and sharing successful experiences – in order to support the reform process of the quality assurance framework for non-formal basic skills programmes in the Netherlands (which started in July, 2019). The speakers, national experts and participants discussed the importance of quality assurance and what a new system should look like.

### 3. Summary of the discussions – Morning plenary sessions

#### 3.1 Welcome addresses

**Mr. Hans Hindriks** (Ministry OCW) delivered an opening speech to the participants, specifying the goal of the reform process: to guarantee a certain level of quality across providers, and to acquire data on providers and publish the results in order to increase transparency. Furthermore, the national experts from Austria, Norway and Slovenia were introduced.

#### 3.2 Presentations

##### *3.2.1 Session 1 – The accreditation of adult training providers in Austria (Ö-Cert).*

**Ms Sabine Püskül** (Project Coordination, Ö-Cert-Geschäftsstelle) addressed the background of adult education in Austria, the reasons for developing the Quality framework for Adult Education in Austria (Ö-Cert) and its characteristics.

In Austria, depending on the definition of the target group for AE – there are around 1.800-3.000 AE providers, a relatively large number (considering a total population of around 8 million citizens). **Institutions are run by various interest groups** like NGO's, Social Partners, Religious Organizations. These were mostly non-profit, but in the past 20 years, an increase in private providers was seen. In comparison to the VET sector or schools, **adult education is a free business in Austria, without common standards** - meaning that anybody can offer an adult education course. Around 1990, Austria started implementing quality models (e.g. ISO, EFQM) to get government funding, using a diversity of standards (in the 9 federal states). This resulted in a situation that one provider needs to satisfy different requirements in each of the federal states, in order to provide training in these states. More and more organizations decided to implement a Quality Management System (QMS) (such as ISO, EFQM, LQW, etc.). As providers were already implementing QMS in their organizations, it made no sense to create another QMS. Thus, the **Ö-Cert was developed as more of an 'umbrella framework', outlining a set of minimum standards** – through cooperation between the Ministry of Education, 9 federal states, representatives of AE providers and Austrian experts in the field of AE. Ö-Cert has been regulated by law since 2012.

In terms of organisational structure, the following characteristics were addressed:

- At the strategic level:
  - **The Steering Group:** representatives of the nine federal states and the ministry of education, that meet twice a year.
  - **The Accreditation Group:** a group of 5 experts that are responsible for the accreditation of providers (i.e. assessing the 'proofs' submitted) and meet approximately 5-7 times a year.
- On the operational level:
  - **The Ö-Cert-Office** – a group of four persons responsible for the first check of the applications and for the central organization.

Altogether, this corresponds to about three full time equivalents (FTE) of working power.

In order to acquire the Ö-Cert, Providers can apply online (while providing the evidence required), a process that takes around 45 minutes if the evidence is gathered beforehand. The application will then be reviewed by Office, followed by accreditation (by the Accreditation group). In case accreditation is denied, feedback will be provided by the experts of the Accreditation group, after which providers have a specified period of time to address the feedback and re-apply.

Furthermore, the **5 basic requirements a provider must meet** for obtaining the Ö-Cert were addressed:

- **General requirements** - provider has to agree on the definitions of LLL and AE;
- Concerning the **organization of the provider** - among others: their main task must be adult education, the provider has to be in business for three years, and at least one educational manager must have a corresponding education and practice
- Concerning the **offers of the provider** - the offers must be open to the public
- Concerning **principles of ethics and democracy** – providers have to acknowledge principles of ethics and democracy
- Concerning **quality**: one QMS-Certificate needs to be submitted, choosing from a list of 11 recognized QMS.<sup>1</sup> Some of the QMS are specialized in AE, others are not, and this is why Ö-Cert also adds additional basic requirements.

Since 2012, a total of 460 providers (1.266 including their branches) have been accredited with Ö-Cert. In terms of costs, providers are to pay 100 Euro for receiving the certificate and the right to use the logo (and another 100 Euro for each renewal). The cost of accreditation is actually much higher

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<sup>(1)</sup> ISO 9001:2008; ISO 29990:2010; EFQM („committed to”, “recognized for excellence”); LQW (Learner-Oriented Quality Certification for Further Education Organizations/Germany); QVB (Quality development in the array of educational institutions/Germany); EduQua (the Swiss quality label); UZB (environment-label/Ministry of Agriculture); four QMS of Austrian federal states: Salzburg, Vienna, Upper Austria, Lower Austria.

(for a three years certificate you pay 2000 Euro), but this amount can be deducted from tax to stimulate the use of Ö-Cert. Moreover, it takes resources from the provider to apply.

The positive aspect of this system is that only one QMS is required for the whole country, when previously different providers or regions used their own QMS. It thus eases funding for learners that undertake education outside the region where they live.

Regarding the **effects of implementing the Ö-Cert**, the following aspects were discussed:

- **Increased professionalization:** by setting minimum standards for staff in terms of pedagogical education;
- **Simplified public administration:** by facilitating learner funding/access for courses outside their own province and providing a better overview of requirements for providers;
- **Increased transparency:** by registration of the providers that have obtained the Ö-Cert;
- **Increasing the organizational Quality** (of provider): By requiring a QMS to be in place;
- **Constant Assurance of Quality:** by requiring providers to renew their Ö-Cert-certificate (once every three years);

An additional, unexpected side-effect was **increased consumer protection:** In order to obtain the Ö-Cert a provider needs to have defined their terms of business. It was soon discovered that there are conditions that might be unlawful – prompting the Ö-Cert (organisation) to ask the association for consumer protection to check the terms. As a result, **a study was published about ‘unlawful clauses’**, which was released from the ministry of education. This study is **currently being used to inform providers**, supporting them in creating lawful clauses.

Ö-Cert became an example and criteria for other funding programmes (like the ESF). If providers want the funding they need to have an O-cert registration.

### Box 1 – Questions & Answers

**Q: Do I understand you correctly that in Austria the learner gets funding to go to provider?**

A: Yes – there is funding for the learner side, but it is also possible for providers to obtain funding. However, there are differences between the 9 federal states (regions / municipalities), as they can determine their system themselves.

**Q: In terms of demarcation, you are using a very broad set of indicators – how do you go about reducing this number? How do you ensure that you have a one-size fits all that works for everybody?**

A: We have institutions that offer VET, but also a lot of courses around it. There is always a mix, but the minimum requirements are the same for small or big companies, meaning small companies also need at least one person for supervision – which is unfair for small companies, as it is harder for them to set up a system. This is a point currently being discussed in Austria as well. With basic requirements, it is difficult to specify conditions such as “learning companies with more than 50 workers need 2 supervisors, etc.” as there are restrictions due to current law. However, one of the provinces supports the institutions in getting their quality assurance mechanisms set up, by covering part of the costs of implementation.

**Q: What about incorporating a star system?**

A: It is something we are considering to show quality, though the quality management system is already hard enough for some companies – as discussed in the previous question.

**Q: It was addressed that providers need to be active for 3 years before being able to apply - thus receive funding for it. How are they expected to operate for 3 years if you cannot get students without funding?**

A: Funding agencies can fund anyone they want; the difference being they are obliged to accept those with o-cert, but they are still free to fund those without QMS (or one that is not on the list of

11 recognized QMS).

**Q: Could you provide any indication of how much of the sector is ‘Ö-Cert proofed’ (i.e. the percentage of providers that do carry the label)?**

A: No, as currently even the total number of providers is unclear (estimation only)

**Q: Is there a quality standard for staff / volunteers?**

A: in Austria the only requirement is the presence of the quality mechanism – they are to do their own quality assurance, regardless of who it does. Furthermore, the audit for accreditation is conducted by a third party, not by o-cert itself.

**Q: Is the list of criteria’s (5) exhaustive?**

A: Yes – and they are available via O-net website.<sup>2</sup> When choosing the systems for the list of accepted QMS, they looked first at which ones were most often seen in Austria – a requirement here was that the system had to be present in more than one instance/case/provider (e.g. a quality system only used in the language branches was not accepted). Moreover, quality systems were selected that have regular audits (such as once in the four year).

**Q: How often are companies NOT awarded a label or are excluded? Are there challenges? How robust is the system?**

A: with some companies, complaints were received, and we are thinking about visiting – but this has not occurred often.

**Q: Where can problems with the quality of the education be addressed then (by student)?**

A: QA only addresses problems with the requirements, not with the ‘complaints about courses’ – since Ö-Cert is developed for the providers mainly, not just students. We are thinking about it, as we feel there is a need for a place for students to go (some exist but scattered), but this is for the ministry to decide.

**Q: The system may be too heavy for volunteers...**

A: We have many such organisations, but there may be differences between the setting / ‘AE landscape’ between Austria and the Netherlands.

**Q: Are students interviewed for the external audit?**

A: No – but part of the requirements for the QMS systems is to include a method to collect feedback from learners, so this aspect should be covered by the provider.

**Q: Do local government and/or o-cert also fund the quality of the teachers, or is this the responsibility of provider?**

A: We have ‘contracts’/conditions for educational organization, for example, that stipulate there should be at least 5 days of training.

**Q: However, learners or employers would need the money for this, small companies may not have the funds for this?**

A: In Austria, if you are employed, there is up to 2000 EU you can get for training (AE/AL) in order to address this.

### *3.2.2 Session 2 – The SkillsPlus initiative in Norway.*

**Ms Astri Pestalozzi** (Senior Advisor, Skills Norway) introduced the organisation, discussed the background of adult education and basic skills in Norway, as well the history of the SkillsPlus programme and its characteristics.

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<sup>(2)</sup> <https://oe-cert.at/weg-zu-ocert/grundvoraussetzungen.php>

**Skills Norway** is a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research which carries the administrative responsibilities for the SkillsPlus programme. Its main goal is to contribute to supporting active citizenship, improving employability and increasing participation in education, more specifically:

- Contributing to **increased employment and active citizenship**;
- Promoting and demonstrating the **importance of national skills policies**;

The organisation partners with other state agencies; labour and employers organisations; regional and municipal agencies; the voluntary sector; adult learning associations; as well as universities and university colleges.

Basic skills have been a point of focus in Norway since the late 90s, when the results from the first OECD literacy survey (IALS/SIALS) indicated that there was a relatively large group of adults who lacked sufficient reading skills. This was confirmed again by the ALL survey in 2003, and through the PIAAC in 2013.

In Norway, there is a **strong coherence between lack of formal education and unemployment** – in that many of the adults with poor basic skills in literacy and numeracy are living on benefits. However, there is **also a large group in working life without any - or with low - formal qualifications**, who lack the necessary basic skills to be able to complete their education. Because basic skills are considered a requirement when it comes to further training and, on the whole, participation in working life.

In order to target these low-skilled groups, the Basic Skills in Working life programme (BKA) – now called Skills Plus - was established in 2006. The programme aims to give adults the opportunity to get the basic skills they need to keep up with the demands and changes in modern working life and civil society.

The Skills Plus programme gives enterprises the **opportunity to provide employees with basic skills training at- or in connection to their daily work**. The basic skills included in the programme are:

- Digital skills
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Oral skills.

**Basic Norwegian** has been included in the programme as well since 2016, because many adult immigrants employed in enterprises needed to learn more Norwegian for their work. Since a few years it has also been possible for NGOs to take part in the programme, but the main part of it is aimed at the working life (i.e. businesses).

Apart from increasing these skills, the programme is expected to contribute to an increased quality of life for the individual, as well as value creation and flexibility at the workplace.

Furthermore, it was addressed that - in order to succeed with SkillsPlus provision - it was important that the training is embedded into and closely related to the participants' daily work. In adult basic skills provision (and AE in general), we should **take into account and value the participants everyday life and working life and how they are going to use the skills after the training**. It is important to build on- and create relationships between the need for skills in the workplace and the actual teaching (i.e. to find good dynamics and mutual enrichment). Therefore, it is important to take advantage of both the differences and the similarities in the learning activities.

In terms of characteristics, the following aspects of the SkillsPlus programme were discussed:

- **Enterprises or learning providers** can apply for funding;
  - Which requires cooperation between enterprise and learning provider;
- **Embedded and situated learning** – based on enterprise's needs;
- Includes **a curriculum in (basic) Norwegian** for adult immigrants;
- Includes **competence goals for Basic skills** (reading, writing, numeracy, digital skills and oral communication) for adults;

- Consists of **standard-length courses** – depending on participants’ needs and level;
- Ensures **mapping and evaluation** of the participants.

Furthermore, **a database has been established** in order to supply up-to-date reports on the progress of the programme. It includes detailed information on participants, industry taking part etc and thereby makes it possible to monitor the activity and evaluate the impact of the programme. The number of participants who have received training (since 2006) now exceeds 90.000. Based on evaluations, the following success aspects of the programme were found to be **success criteria**:

- Based on prior learning/ competence
- Meeting current / actual needs
- Workplace or NGO as learning arena
- Committed management
- Authentic material
- Competent teachers

Especially the aspects ‘committed management’ in the enterprises and ‘close cooperation between enterprise and learning provider’ were crucial – in order to assure that the training meets actual needs. **The enterprises know best what they want and need** – meaning they should be allowed to define their own goals. Furthermore, learning providers must have the competence to map the participants, to see what is needed and to determine how to set up the courses (based on the participants’ skills).

In terms of improving the quality of teachers and providers, **the programme provides online courses for teachers** (Basic Skills and SkillsPlus; Adult learning in working life), **organises yearly regional meetings for providers** (for experience exchange) and **provides further education for teachers**. Lastly, providers need to be certified (for at least 2 years) and have a good managing system in place for them to be able to provide the SkillsPlus projects. Apart from being able to provide a good pedagogic environment, they need to be willing to cooperate with enterprises and follow up on students.

Currently, Norway is planning to **develop the programme further**, particularly on the following aspects:

- Management – keeping it simple
- Knowledge – further developing the database, allowing for further analysis and research
- Standardising the programme
- Information
- Developing tools
- Providers – certificate
- Teachers education

Lastly, the **current challenges** were addressed

- Quality criteria and assessment
- Can we measure effects and outcomes?
- How to reach small enterprises?
  - Small enterprises often have to cooperate with other enterprises
  - Certain trades are more difficult to reach than others

One of the main **difficulties in having absolute demands for the programme**, is that - if the standards are too high - it would be impossible for smaller enterprises to take part (for example differences in travel time / distance from public transport).

## Box 2 – Questions and answers

**Q: You showed us some quality criteria – are there more specific ‘indicators, for example for what constitutes a good pedagogic environment?’**

A: There is a list, but we haven't been very specific in this (For example: 'there needs to be several people with varied experiences'; 'there should be at least one person with pedagogical background'). In some cases, it is not possible to have all aspects in one provider, since they work together with other providers. Also, the certificate is valid for 2 years, then they need to renew.

**Q – It was mentioned online that you have inspections of providers?**

A - Not as many as we would like to, but yes, to make sure providers are doing what they are asked to.

**Q - Are there certified providers that do not receive funding for the project currently?**

A: Yes, in a few cases it occurred that we initially wanted to fund them, and then it turned out they couldn't start the programme (for example due to lack of participants) – so in the end funding was not awarded. We are working towards having some certified providers that get funding for 3 years, starting the programme whenever needed. Generally speaking, around 40-50% of applications for funding are awarded.

**Q – In the Netherlands, we experience trouble in 'finding'/upskilling (new) Dutch learners – also know that this is difficult due to the separate systems, two money streams, two ministries, etc. How is this dealt with in NO?**

A – The systems for education and immigration in Norway are not one system, but they do use the same education part. Furthermore, immigrants come to us themselves (as they obliged to do so by law).

**Q – You mentioned one of the challenges is measuring the outcomes, 'what is changing in their lives'. If I understand as well, the training is linked to the working environment – do you have some method/tool to collect information on their outcomes through the employer? Some aspects may be too abstract to measure easily, but this may be a way to measure their progression in the workplace somehow?**

A: During the bigger evaluations, we get feedback from companies – to what extent their employees make less mistakes in production, experience higher self-esteem, want to do more, etc. It was also found that many get motivated to formalise their skills. We are looking at how to get the results more systematically (continuously). We think these outcomes are important, but we also want to see whether they actually do further education afterwards (but this is not in the goals of the skills+ programme).

### *3.2.3 Slovenia's holistic approach to quality assurance.*

**Ms Jasmina Orešnik Cunja** (Senior Advisor, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education) addressed some highlights regarding the background of AE in Slovenia, the development and implementation of the **OQEA model** (*'Offering Quality Education to Adults'*) and its characteristics. In Slovenia, **the foundation for AE started about 20 years ago** (although there was no term specified for it, at the time), leading to the development of the first quality indicators (in 2003) of the OQEA model, for which self-evaluation was a central approach. Additionally, the quality cycle itself was used to develop the approach. In terms of funding, the Government provided finances to institutes in order for them to implement the model, and also to some providers.

**Last year, finally, a new act for Slovenian adult education was introduced** – making self-evaluation part of the law (i.e. mandatory). However, the school inspection is only checking for compliance with the laws - meaning there is no accreditation (only obligatory entry in the official register of the providers of AE). Furthermore, the new Act obliges providers of AE to commit themselves to quality assessment activities:

- **Quality assessment:** obtaining and evaluating data (both quantitative and qualitative) on the processes, results and effects of programs and activities regulated by law;

- **Continuous monitoring:** the rapid response and introduction of corrective actions and improvements, based on data and information;
- **Self-evaluation:** an in-depth and systematic process, which involves (1) the collection of data and information, (2) the written presentation and interpretation of the results and the planning, and (3) the introduction of measures for the development of quality;
- **Quality development:** the planning and implementation of measures for maintaining and developing quality.

Within this context, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) participated in the preparation of expert bases for the law, as well as the development of approaches and activities (internal quality system; continuous monitoring; self-evaluation; quality committee), which are now systematically included in the law. Overall, SIAE uses the following approaches to increase the quality of AE in Slovenia:

- **Developing internal and external approaches** to quality assessment and quality development;
- **Counselling and training adult educators** in implementing quality models, methods, approaches;
- Developing the **information-communication support and professional literature** in the field of quality;
- **Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness** of new solutions and rethinking necessary improvements;
- Ensuring **the flow of knowledge on quality in international networks**.

Between 2001 – 2013 the OQEA model has been implemented in 69 educational organisations, and in terms of timeline it is a process of working with providers for around 2 years. **The first year is for incorporation of the model** - helping AE providers to set up the QA infrastructure in their organisations (i.e. training of staff; establishment of quality committees, etc.). **The second year is for gathering data** and see whether they want to continue the way they have developed it, or to improve their model further (by incorporating additional approaches – such as quality counsellors, quality incentives, et cetera.). In terms of funding, there were national incentives in place for providers in order to stimulate the use of the systemic approach (OQEA model).

Besides the OQEA model, throughout the process, **specialised literature** which did not exist before (i.e. in Slovenian language) was developed for this field – meaning that, at the same time, the professional development of the field itself was stimulated. Furthermore, SIAE has been developing their approach regarding ICT support for providers, by developing and maintaining the **‘Mosaic of Quality’** <sup>(3)</sup> in 2017. This (web-based) portal serves as an online collection of recommendations, tools and good practices for the establishment and development of the internal quality system and was **very well-received by providers, since everything is accessible through one place** – it also inspired providers to send in good practice examples themselves to add onto the collection.

In terms of the **specifications of the OQEA model** (presented below, in Figure 1), it was addressed that it distinguishes between a set of quality areas - each with a respective set of (transverse) quality factors. For each quality factor (i.e. input / output / process factor), a set of quality standards (indicators) are included. A full overview of the collection of quality indicators was published in 2013, of which the publication is also available in English.<sup>4</sup>

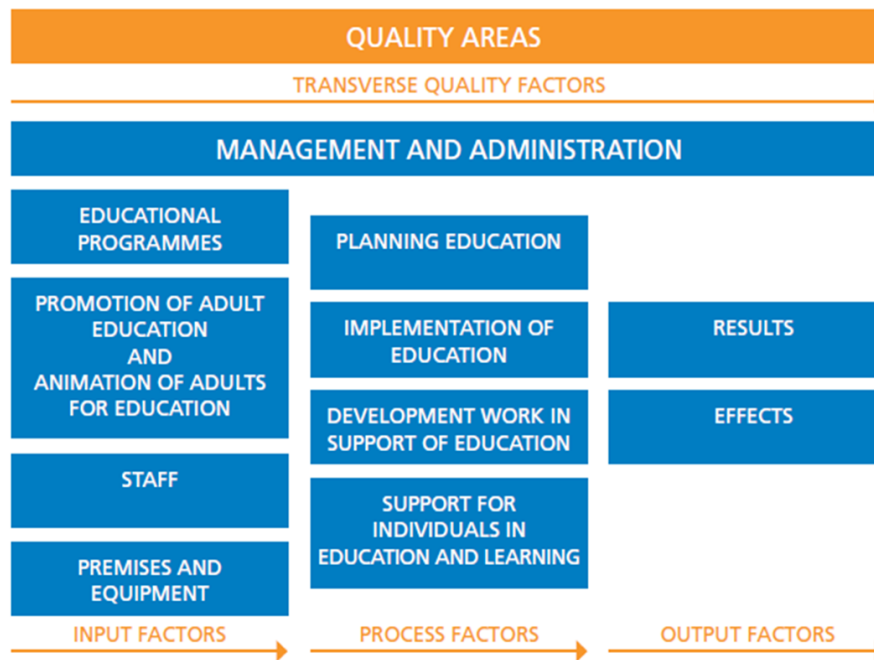
Figure 1 – The quality areas and indicators of the OQEA model.

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<sup>(3)</sup> <https://mozaik.acs.si/>

<sup>(4)</sup> Available at: <http://kakovost.acs.si/doc/N-1077-1.pdf>





Source: PowerPoint presentation of the Slovenian case, as provided by Ms Jasmina Orešnik Cunja (Senior Advisor, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education).

**The OQEA model is only one of the internal approaches** included in the support from SIAE regarding QA in adult education. Other internal approaches relate to the coordination of a network of (trained) quality counsellors in AE and providing training, ICT-support and counselling. The conditions for a quality counsellor are: (1) participation in trainings (organised by the SIAE), (2) formal appointment through SIAE, (3) being able to work approximately 32 hours per month, and (4) being active in the network of quality counsellors. **Furthermore, a set of external approaches are used within the context of AE:**

- Quality incentives – by allowing providers to apply for the ‘green quality logo’;
- Peer reviews;
- Expert national evaluations.

The **green quality logo** aims to motivate educational organisations to constantly care about how they work, and systematically work on the field of quality in AE. Currently, there are 38 organisations that have been awarded the logo.<sup>5</sup> For this logo, providers need to meet 8 quality standards, but there is no official audit. In a similar project, they did use audits/visits – and got much resistance against it - due to the high administrative costs that were not being covered (e.g. no funding for taking part).

### Box 3 – Questions and answers

**Q – How time-consuming is it for the provider to do the self-evaluation? And once you have done the evaluation, does it give you access to funding that you don’t have without doing it? (i.e. what is the reward?)**

The process takes at least a year and a half – it is a small team and the process takes a long time to set up initially (for each provider). But, after the process is implemented – it only takes a small amount of time to perform the self-assessments periodically (i.e. only need to follow-up each three years, showing what was done – it is easier for providers to choose some indicators, look where they are in terms of that indicator and plan actions (if necessary). In terms of funding, last year, the

<sup>(5)</sup> More specifically: 3 secondary schools; 2 school centres; 27 adult educational centres; 6 private educational organisations

new Act put this self-assessment as obligatory, but there are no regulations on how this needs to be reported (i.e. each provider decides what to do with results). Before the change, providers only needed to be registered to operate (with basic requirements on location, etc.).

**Q: There are many goals of monitoring – which category would you put the Slovenian case?**

A: Providers already know they do have to do some QA in order to be competitive in the market. In Slovenia, the main objective of the approach is to take the point of view of the providers.

**Q: You gave some indications towards the scope of the project (69 providers initially, number of green logo's awarded, etc.). How many providers are there in total in Slovenia?**

A: We work mainly with educational institutions, and only some private organisations. In Slovenia, we have a public network of providers (registered in ministry), corresponding to about 32 adult educational centres in Slovenia (of which 27 have green logo). The number of secondary schools is uncertain – they do the VET programmes, but we don't cover those.

### *3.2.4 Session 4 – Dutch experiences on quality assurance*

#### *3.2.4.1 Quality Assurance in Education ('Kwaliteitsborging binnen educatie')*

**Mr Wouter Heijne** (Quality Advisor, Friesland College) addressed the role of the 'Friesland College' within (VET) education for their municipality and provided recommendations regarding the development of a quality assurance system for this working group. Friesland College provides regular MBO education (VET at levels 1 through 4) - through company training, integration courses, formal and non-formal education as well as (continued) adult education (e.g. 'VAVO') since 1995 (when the WEB was introduced). Furthermore, **it is the only provider within this context for the municipality** ('Friesland'), which consists of 18 municipalities and is coordinated at the regional level by the municipality of Leeuwarden. In terms of demographics, it was specified that the region has around 650.000 citizens and falls within one labour market region.

Overall, the Friesland College covers of 130 educational programmes, corresponding to approximately 9.500 students. When in 2015, the educational budget was also to be used for the 'open market' (non-formal and informal education), for the local government this was initially a threat, rather than an improvement (the risk of losing the existing infrastructure, for example). **Following the changes to the WEB, the budget is now awarded based on the number of labour market regions** (which is only 1 in Friesland) – of which 65% is reserved for the formal sector, 35% for the non-formal (and informal) sector. Within this context, some insights were discussed in terms of the **benefits of working with one provider at the municipal level:**

- Increasing the throughput ('doorstroom') of learners;
- Preventing fragmentation in terms of supply ('aanbod') and funding;
- One quality cycle / monitoring system;
- Increased professionalisation of teachers;
- Allows for a participant registration system;
- Allows for local admission ('intake') of learners;
- Allows for personal education trajectory planning (i.e. individual guidance).
- Strong cooperation with the region and knowledge within the field

Furthermore, the quality of volunteers can be improved through training, intervision ('intervisie') and guidance by the Friesland College.

In terms of the **quality criteria that are important to consider for the overarching system**, the following aspects were discussed:

- Develop and maintain a **strong connection with regional partners;**
- Work with **limited educational pathways;**
  - Formal (max 18 months)
  - Non-formal (in development)

- **More group work instead of individual assignments.** Also indicate what is considered a group (e.g. minimum number of individuals);
- **Spread locations** of education;
- **Use learners** in designing the offer;
- Need to have a **quality system**;
- Have all parties use **one registration system**;
- Have **teachers do the intake**;
- Set targets and report quarterly on:
  - Numbers;
  - Instream;
  - Target group;
  - Examination;
  - Relevant developments.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that **WEB is one part of a larger approach ('laaggeletterdheid')** and there is a need to find cross-links between **WEB and other approaches** (together with municipalities). Be active in communication and collaboration with the different chains of organisations involved (municipality, libraries, welfare organisations).

#### **Box 4 – Questions and answers**

**Q: You mentioned the library as an example, what is the role of ROCs (from Friesland College) here?**

A: We are contracted to provide the training/etc for volunteers working at the library. In the non-formal sector we worked together with our municipality's libraries and welfare organisations and have set up some criteria for volunteers (to follow our training, among others).

**Q In some regions, when people (receiving support through the welfare system) are sent to another organisation, we lose visibility over where they go / how they do afterwards. How is this addressed by the Friesland College?**

A: We have contracts with all providers across the region, so even when an individual 'moves' between trajectories / organisations, it is more of a 'soft referral' ('warme overdracht').

**Q It was mentioned that you train the volunteers – do you also train the teachers that train the volunteers?**

Yes – as this is easier than having every trainer meet a certain set of criteria beforehand (in terms of administrative workload).

**Q. Since Friesland also speaks Friesian (besides Dutch). How about those with another native language (Arabic, etc.)?**

A: You see that, especially with young kids, they are quick to adopt a new language, and without this base it is much more difficult. We do notice sometimes that we connect better with people in Friesian. We ask people what they want to learn, and which needs come with that learning goal.

**Q How many professional teachers are currently on this project?**

A: For approaches in the non-formal sector there 1 teacher, supporting around 30 volunteers, ultimately reaching around 30-40 participants

**Q: It seems very good that you connect the volunteers to the professionals directly, but the skewed numbers would be a challenge (e.g. more volunteers, less professionals))?**

A: This is indeed something to consider when scaling up such an approach to larger regions / municipalities.

### 3.2.4.2 Quality Assurance of Adult Education in the Netherlands

**Ms Elwine Halewijn** (Director for Adult Education, Institute for Language Research and Language Education Amsterdam) discussed the characteristics of a quality assessment tool (KETKIT) that was developed by the Knowledge Institute for Language Development in Amsterdam (ITTA). The main objective of the KETKIT tool is to **provide direct insight into the classroom**, distinguishing between a set of 5 elements, for which aspects and criteria of behaviour (indicators) were developed:

- Didactics - teacher behaviour, materials, etc.;
- Student support - intake, etc.;
- Facilities - classrooms, toilets, etc.;
- Management - teacher qualifications<sup>6</sup>;
- Quality assurance – using the PDCA method.<sup>7</sup>

A full list of the specified aspects and criteria per aspect was presented to participants at the workshop in form of a handout.

In terms of process, the following aspects were discussed:

- An assessment is required every 4 years;
- The instrument used by providers, through self-evaluation;
- There is a formal assessment by external, independent assessor;
- Providers can be assessed to be ‘insufficient’, ‘sufficient’ or ‘good’.<sup>8</sup>

**The assessment itself is performed through three steps:** (1) document study and interviews with management; (2) observations and interviews with teachers and students; (3) written and oral report, regarding the judgement - with explanations and recommendations for improvement. **In case the provider is deemed insufficient**, a ‘SMART’ improvement plan is to be developed and another visit will be scheduled after one year. If the provider is still deemed insufficient, they lose their certification (and would need to re-certify)

#### Box 5 – Questions and answers

**Q: What I don’t see is that the lessons / goals are agreed upon by the learner?**

A: part of the intake indicator (see aspect B1b on the handout) – where the intake method can be assessed. This refers to the requirement of providing enough opportunity (for the learner) to ask questions, as well as the opportunity to answer questions (for teachers).

**Q: Is this in terms of how to arrange the intake or how to behave as a teacher?**

A: Both, since many students are able to meet their needs, so long as they have had a proper intake.

**Q A few years ago you introduced an instrument for second language learning – would this apply to first language learning as well?**

A: No, as there are significant differences between first and second language learning. A few years ago, the number of people for first language learning was much smaller. Now, we are at the point of designing specifically for the first language and we would be willing to develop a similar, smaller instrument to cover the varying forms of informal education regarding basic skills.

**Q: In Rotterdam, for example, it would be difficult to implement such a provision, since the municipality does not provide funding for any non-formal programmes, as this is done by the social welfare organisation. This issue is, in part, being caused by the interchangeably-being-used terms informal / non-formal. How could this be addressed?**

A: For the informal / non-formal sectors, the main goal of the provision may not be language

<sup>6</sup> Not just in terms of levels, also type of qualification.

<sup>7</sup> Which generally stands for ‘plan–do–check–act’ or ‘plan–do–check–adjust’.

<sup>8</sup> This provides an advantage, as it supports the local government in steering on the quality of education.

learning – therefore some of the criteria (such as using certain grammar) are less relevant and could be excluded from the envisioned tool (i.e. tailoring it to different sectors).

**Q: How to take into account that not all learning is done in a classroom?**

A: Even then, there would be a place of learning to identify (workplace, etc.). This falls back under the importance point of assessing what type of provision it is, and to select which criteria need to be used based on that.

## 4. Summary of the discussions – Afternoon round-tables sessions

*Representatives of Dutch municipalities were divided into 4 groups, to brainstorm on international best practices and their possible applicability in The Netherlands. For each of the following topics, the groups of representatives presented the main outcomes of their discussions.*

### 4.1 Is quality assurance important?

1. Do you think it is important to develop a common quality assurance system for adult non-formal education in the Netherlands?

2. Write down at least 3 reasons for and 3 reasons against the development of a quality assurance system in the Netherlands.

Following the presentations after the first round of discussions, most groups indicated there is a need for an overarching framework, but there are still some aspects that need to be considered, among others:

- It **needs to be demarcated what is being assessed for which parties** (i.e. sectors) - even then, municipalities could still do different things with the funding (i.e. allow flexibility at local level);
- Monitoring (as discussed in another working group) could be used as an overview of what happens, but can also **feed into QA**;
- We need to **prevent the existence of different systems next to each other, while not being concurrent with each other** (i.e. for different types of non-formal) and systems should not block innovation;
- As a consequence of the organisational structure overall (e.g. the decentralisation), separate ministries have started using projects involving language (i.e. language as instrument) to achieve their goals – thus the approach would require increased communication and collaboration between ministries as well.

In terms of pro's and cons, the following aspects were mainly discussed:

- **'Pro's'**
  - Standardisation facilitates comparison of results;
  - Improves consumer protection;
  - Can be fed with results from monitoring.
- **'Cons'**
  - Bureaucracy (increased administrative workload);
  - Makes innovation difficult;
  - Hard to make an umbrella for a system that has no set shape;

Feedback from the national experts on this topic addressed the following points:

- In the case of Austria, providers were happy about the implementation of the Ö-Cert and the **limited administration necessary**. There were different systems to which providers should comply, but it was apparent you cannot do this only looking top-down. Our evaluation showed us that there is a lot of control, also beyond our system. **It would be recommended to identify and make use of existing systems.**

- In the case of Norway, the certification is based on previous practice. We were afraid it excluded small providers. Furthermore, it is different when also managing NGO's.
- In the case of Slovenia, the **quality indicators can be used to help providers in developing their own internal quality assurance system**. For this, self-assessment is an important aspect of the approach.

#### 4.2 What can be learnt from the European experience?

Which features of the European initiatives you have heard this morning do you ...?

- a) Like and think can be adapted to your local context
- b) Like but think cannot be easily reproduced in your context
- c) Dislike

Regarding (a), the initiatives that were **liked and may be adaptable to the Dutch context**, participants mainly referred to the Slovenian system for quality support, particularly the aspect of 'self-assessment' it includes. Additionally, the following aspects were addressed:

- It is a **benefit for providers** in terms of what they can gain when having the certificate, as well as providing the resources through the web-based portal, 'Mozaik';
- It is **not a system of demands**, but designed to support, train and improve;
- It **involves a network of trained 'quality counsellors'** (and minimum requirement for non-formal providers);

Additionally, a specific aspect of the Austrian case was taken into consideration as well – **to develop a uniform system (umbrella)** - although not within a context of recognizing certifications (as this is not so much the case in the Netherlands), but **more towards providers being able to show what they are doing on a (number of) separate 'topics'** (i.e. separate surveys, representing separate parts of the overarching umbrella).

Regarding (b), the initiatives that were **liked but may not be adaptable to the Dutch context**, participants mainly discussed the Norwegian case, due to the fact that in Norway, the learner receives money to study – which is not applicable in NL. Furthermore, it was noted that most of the examples presented did not include the needs of learners and the relevance of the QA for them. For Austria and Norway, this was due to the focus being more towards the providers and employers than the learners, whereas in the Slovenian case, **one of the areas in which support is provided corresponds to incorporating student satisfaction surveys** into the QA model of providers.

As most aspects were already discussed in the first two categories, there were no additional points on 'disliked' examples. Other points that were addressed, were mainly related to the approach that is considered best-adaptable so far – using self-assessment:

- It is important to note that **there are differences in how well students are able to respond to sensitive questions** (such as those on the quality of their teacher). Generally speaking, higher-educated students have less problems providing their feedback / critique, whereas the lower educated students are less likely to speak up. It would be advised against to use 'handout surveys' for students, as they would need to be given back to the teacher in question (thus facilitating response bias);
- It is important to **include volunteers as well** in terms of asking them about their opinions / satisfaction;
- There is an **international survey on self-evaluations**, with scores on social domains that may serve as inspiration as well.

Feedback by the national experts on this round of discussions addressed the following points:

- The Austrian system is indeed very specific to Austria and the QA is relatively expensive, although this was mainly due to most of the companies in Austria already having their own



systems in place – at which point a new system would have resulted in an increased administrative burden.

- It is also important to **take into account the time it takes to develop a proper system** – and that it is mostly an **ongoing process** in which it is very important to include the providers into the decision-making process.
- For now, there seems to be the idea it has to be one system. Seeing the approach in Slovenia (both internal and external approaches/instruments), on the other hand, it is important to **consider that it can also become a multi-part approach**.

#### 4.3 What should a new quality assurance system look like?

<p>1. In your opinion, which method for quality assessment is more appropriate for the Dutch case?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With minimum standards: accreditation</li><li>• With minimum standards: quality labels</li><li>• Without minimum standards: external evaluation</li><li>• Without minimum standards: self-evaluation</li></ul> <p>2. Write down the features that you would like to see in a quality assurance framework for adult non-formal education in the Netherlands.</p>
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Overall, two of the categories were mainly presented by participants, with some adaptations:

- (1) a system with minimum standards, incorporating aspects of **accreditation**;
- (2) a system without minimum standards, incorporating **self-assessment**.

It was noted, however, that the Dutch landscape in terms of AE is very diverse – so it would be difficult to tell different parties what they need to start doing (especially those that work under different laws, posing limitations).

For the case of **(1) - a system with minimum standards (accreditation)**, it was addressed not to include an Audit (as the added value is currently unclear). Additionally, the instrument should be based on dialogue with providers (and other stakeholders). Features discussed for this approach included, among others:

- It should have flexibility – adaptable to the type of provision (i.e. click and select);
- It should focus on practical criteria;
- We should work bottom up: start from the perspective of learner / professionals;
- It is important to have commitment of providers. They are partners;
- There should be clear benefits for the providers (to join accreditation and support);
- It should provide added value in assessing social impact.

For the case of a **(2) - a system without minimum standards (self-assessment)**, the results are to be published at national level. Furthermore, organisations should be supported in how to do the self-evaluation. In this case as well, the need for an audit or check was unclear. Features and topics discussed for this approach included, among others:

- Customer satisfaction;
- Flexibility for providers in the system they use;
- Training the teachers;
- Education of the volunteers;
- Attention for digital skills;
- Regular checks on innovation for updates on skills / vocabulary.

Additionally, some **mixed approaches** were discussed, that did not fit the demarcation for the (4) approaches as presented initially. These were broadly described as the following alternatives:

- We can consider a more **progressive model**, that poses some minimum requirements, depending on the sector a provider belongs to (i.e. formal, informal, non-formal), at different levels of progression – meaning determining additional / optional, ‘advanced’ requirements regarding the providers approach regarding volunteers (self-evaluation and ad-hoc visits), professionalisation of the assessment by including external evaluation, et cetera. Features discussed for this system included:
  - Gain insight on how issues are dealt with (professionalisation)
  - Provide intake / admission and needs assessment;
  - Include the learners’ and teachers’ voice;
  - Include the partners’ voice;
  - Develop a vision in terms of sustainability (i.e. what are the next steps?).
- Another approach is to **start from non-formal education and deal with the variety first**. Municipalities can ‘buy in’ courses while including quality standards in the tender – therefore including it in the accreditation phase of any application. For free education, there are no standards yet and it would be advised to study the needs (and recommendations) of organisations via survey in terms of (among others):
  - The higher aim of their courses;
  - Training volunteers;
  - Connecting with other parties;
  - Which facilities and outcomes are of interest;
  - Student satisfaction.

Feedback from the national experts on this round of discussions, addressed the following points:

- **Austria:** It would be possible to **choose for a mix of self-evaluation with quality labels**. What I think is really nice is the aspect of peer-reviewing, but all this is very time-consuming: who will perform, who will check, who is going to do the work? Also – is it fair for everyone (i.e. motivating volunteers)?
- **Norway:** It would be possible to **characterise it as a process from the beginning** – by setting up and implementing more of a base / foundation for QA, and give providers time to adapt it (3 years, for example), thus involving them into the process. Regarding the uncertainty issues (i.e. whether accreditation goes through or not) **it would be possible to give providers additional time to adapt** (1/2 year, more) for them to still get it. Also, consider beforehand where you will obtain the learners’ voice - how do you get reliable information, considering how small the share of valid respondents for any survey would actually be (generally this is only a small percentage in the first place).
- **Slovenia:** If you want to know the students, the best way would still be through the teacher, as they know their students best. In terms of implementation it would be recommended to **take small steps for the start, then allow providers to adapt the system**. It is also possible, for example, to add aspects in stages throughout the process. Lastly it is important to note that **the quality control should not be one appointed person** – because then everyone will think this is the person to do everything for the organisation, while the responsibility to provide quality is on everyone involved (i.e. emphasise the shared responsibility of all parties involved).

#### 4.4 Final remarks

**Ms Glenda Quintini** (Senior Economist/Policy Analyst, OECD) closed the workshop with some final remarks, regarding the following aspects:

- Overall, there is consensus on some final challenges, more specifically to **ensure that the QA framework to be developed does not pose difficulties in terms of limitations for innovation and exclusion of employers**;



- To a certain extent, there is consensus in that self-assessment could be an interesting approach for the Dutch case, but there would still need to be some **distinguishment between sectors in order to account for the diversity in educational offers**;
- Lastly, it is considered important to **include the voices of learners and volunteers** as well.