

## EMPLOYMENT OF EQVET-US FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY ASSESMENT IN A ROMANIAN COLLEGE

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### Abstract

*The European project “European Quality Assurance in VET towards new Eco Skills and Environmentally Sustainable Economy” (acronym eQvet-us) have developed the eQvet-us framework and practice set, which support sustainability implementation and self evaluation in Vocational Education and Training organizations. The purpose of the paper is to present some sustainability results in the “Transylvania” Economic College of Tîrgu Mureş (CET), which are supported by the eQvet-us products. The implementation is discussed in detail and the results are analysed. The evaluation of the eQvet-us quality indicator appreciates a “good level” for implementation of sustainability in CET. An improvement plan is elaborated with action on different terms. Than a series of good practices, lessons learnt and strategies for implementing have been formulated which can be useful for interested organizations in sustainability implementation.*

**Key words:** vocational education and training, reference framework, sustainable development, quality assurance, quality indicator

### 1. Introduction

Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been on the spotlight since the very beginning of the twenty first Century. In 2001 the European Forum on Quality in VET was founded by the European Commission, followed by the establishment of the Technical Working Group on Quality in VET (TWG) in 2002. In 2004, the first common reference framework for quality in VET was developed, the Common Quality Assurance Framework for European vocational education and training, in the context of the Copenhagen Process and in 2005 the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) is established to provide a sustainable platform for the EU members, supporting the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration (2005-2009).

On June 2009, the European Parliament released a recommendation for the implementation of a European Quality Reference Framework for Education and Training [19], giving the first step for the formal implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

### 2. Current status

The current status of implementation of European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) in European countries [18] demonstrates that progress have been made towards national standards for Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers

but there is still room for improvement. A lot of effort is performed in order to develop models [6], environments [9] organize quality [14] and sustainability [11] systems in VET which employ modern tools [1], methods [8] methodologies [5, 12] models [13]and services [4] for training [7] and skills development [10] in order to demonstrate economic efficiency [3].

In this context after mapping the state of the art similar initiatives at European level: EQAVET projects [17] and national level in Romania – The National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) [16] it was developed the project “European Quality Assurance in VET towards new Eco Skills and Environmentally Sustainable Economy” (acronym eQvet-us) [21], in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, by “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu-Mureş (UPM) plus 6 VET partners including “Transilvania” Economic College of Tîrgu-Mures (CET).

Main results developed in the eQvet-us project are:

- eQvet-us reference framework for sustainable development, and
- eQvet-us practice set consisting in a guide for implementing, evaluation, review of the framework.

### 3. The eQvet-us framework and practice set

The eQvet-us framework has been developed based on the principle that training contributes to the development of human capital, enhances social

cohesion and should also pursue financial sustainability and environmental responsibility.

The background for establishing eQvet-us framework lies on the partners of the consortium already established Quality Management Systems (QMS) & ISO Standards Accreditations and their compatibilities with the EQAVET Indicators and Indicative descriptors for VET Providers, especially in Training provision.

eQvet-us quality framework establishes a series of indicators addressed at VET providers that have already QMS incorporated in their organizations and wishes to continually improve the effectiveness of the quality management system, through the establishment of quality indicators to monitor and promote their sustainable development. The conceptual model of the eQvet-us framework is presented in figure 1.



Fig. 1: eQvet-us framework conceptual model

eQvet-us Framework is settled based on the 3 pillars of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, embedded in the 7 social responsibility (SR) core subjects referenced in ISO26000 [20], adapted to Training Delivery context:

- 1 - Organizational governance
- 2 - Human rights
- 3 - Labour practices
- 4 - Environment
- 5 - Fair operating practices
- 6 - Consumer issues
- 7 - Community involvement and development

In order to establish the list of indicators of the eQvet-us framework, each core activity of the training has been related with the main core subjects of Social Responsibility [2] and finally 61 indicators were deduced [21, section downloads].

Starting from the indicators in the eQvet-us framework than the eQvet-us practice set was developed, which contains a question addressed to each indicator in the framework in order to evaluate the degree of fulfilment in the organization. In the self assessment phase, by employment of the practice set, the evaluation is performed on a scale from (0) poor to, ..., (3) excellent [21, section downloads].

Finally the eQvet-us quality indicator is computed

as a report from the reached points and reachable points.

#### 4. Implementation results

The eQvet-us framework has been implemented in CET in the interval November 2015 – January 2016, than a self assessment has been performed by a team of 4 people with different responsibilities: teacher, manager, administrative and quality assurance.

In order to have a general overview about CET state it is calculated the eQvet-us quality indicator in percent, as follows:

Maximum score (possible responses x 3) = 61 x 3 = 183  $\cong$  100%; cumulative points: 7 x 0 + 6 x 1 + 30 x 2 + 18 x 3 = 120.

eQvet-us quality indicator = (cumulative points x 100%) : The maximum score = (120 / 183 ) x 100 = 65,57 %.

Final appreciation of the implementation is that as regards sustainability CET is an a “Good level”.

In order to know the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, then the evaluation was performed more detailed and categorize the results of the evaluation with the self diagnostic tool into the indicator groups of the framework as presented in table 1.

Table 1: Results categorized into indicator groups

No of the evaluation	1	
Date 16.12.2015	Points	Percent
1. Organizational governance	16 / 27	59,25 %
2. Human rights	24 / 30	80 %
3. Labor practices	19 / 33	57,57 %
4. Environment	13 / 24	54,16 %
5. Fair operating practices	18 / 21	85,71 %
6. Consumer issues	16 / 21	76,19 %
7. Community involvement and development	14 / 27	51,85 %

These data have been used to draw a radar diagram (Figure 2) demonstrating the distribution of the reached point into the indicator groups. This may help assessors to decide which actions for the improvement are necessary and elaborate an action plan for improvement (table 2).

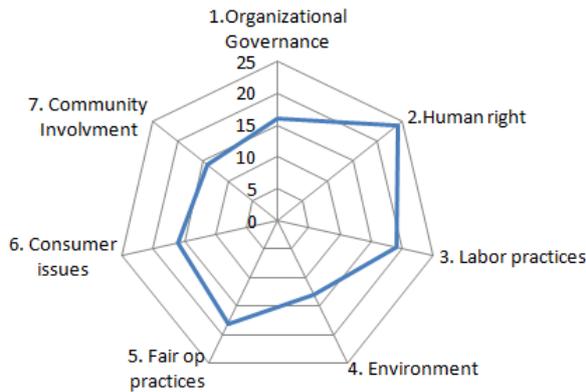


Fig. 2: Results evaluation on indicators

Table 2: Action plan

No.	Description of the measures	Indicator code
Short-term measures (in 3 months)		
1	Improving questionnaire to measure participants satisfaction concerning their perceptions of learning outcomes	(E.A.2)
2	Develop a questionnaire for trainers satisfaction measurement	(I.A.3.2)
3	Inclusion in the student questionnaire of questions regarding collaboration and involvement of companies	(E.A.7)
Medium-term measures (in 1 year)		
1	Concluding agreements with local organizations for work-based training routes	(I.A.7.2)
2	Improving environmental consumption	(E.B.4)
3	Providing training services to companies	(E.B.5)
Long-term measures (in 3 years)		
1	Establishing specializations taught in other languages (Hungarian)	(P.B.1)
2	Assessment of the relationship between the training provided and performance at work	(E.B.6)
3	Measuring the impact of training as part of the relationship with companies and stakeholders	(E.B.7)

In the action plan each measure has a deadline, allocated resources, evidence, effectiveness and sign of fulfillment.

### 5. Results interpretation

After the 3 month period of eQvet-us framework implementation in CET and evaluation by means of

practice set, a series of good practices, lessons learnt and strategies for implementing have been formulated.

The good practices related to testing and implementing the eQvet-us framework and practice set in CET are:

- A first good practice consists in communicating with colleagues and departments within the college, which is essential for proper development of self-evaluation;
- Teamwork, formation of a self-assessment team of people with experience in quality assurance and good knowledgeable about the realities of the college is another element that favours the success of the action;
- Brainstorming from the indicators assessment stage, on which each member of the team came with own experience, knowledge and personal thinking, favours an objective assessment of the reality inside the organization;
- Support of the management facilitated understanding by the entire organization's collective of the system implementation, self-assessment and improvement plan implementation utility;
- The evaluation allowed an exercise without prior, an enthusiasm of staff who discussed the essence of the performed activities from a different perspective than the daily one, an output from the routine that beyond usefulness generated friendships within the team.

The lessons learnt from testing and implementing the eQvet-us framework and practice set in CET are:

- Prior to this experience CET was not involved in European projects which concerned the implementation of quality assurance systems and sustainability. In college there is a quality assurance committee that works under ARACIP - Romanian Association for Quality Assurance in Highschools;
- Implementation of eQvet-us demonstrated the usefulness of the quality assurance structures and compatibility with the requirements of the new system, in terms of human resources but also of already existing practices, implementation and evaluation;
- The framework implementation allowed analysing of the relationship with the local community, the cooperation with businesses in the region;
- Institution and teachers had the opportunity to analyze in detail the three pillar of sustainable development: environmental, social and economic, but also to evaluate their performance as a matter of CET belonging to a modern society that has evolved in regard to sustainable development issues;

- The discovery of some working aspects of the organization that have never been approached before is one of the positive results;
- The decision to involve representatives of different jobs that can be found in the organization has a positive effect;
- The selection of indicators for each activity enables a better appreciation of evolution towards «good practices».

After this experience the tips / strategies for implementing the eQvet-us framework and practice set in other VET we recommend are:

- Top management should be convinced of the importance of self-evaluation, the usefulness of the end result, because his attitude facilitates a serious implementation and self-evaluation, credible in organization;
- Involvement in the self-evaluation team of the quality assurance commission at school level and the responsible for health and safety at work gives weight to the process;
- In designing the action plan should be given priority indicators evaluated with 0 and 1;
- School should inform schools inspectorate in order to be supported in the process;
- That develop and monitor continuous training and self-development of staff in sustainability

Further suggestions on enhancing the eQvet-us framework and practice set transferability to other countries and institutions:

- Development of an internal procedure on self-assessment of sustainability that describes the stages and steps to follow up;
- Training all staff about the framework for sustainable development content;
- Informing the staff about the period of the self-assessment;
- Including in the self-assessment team of people who have large experience and responsibilities in the institution, and who have a good knowledge of the organization as a whole in order to get the representation and opinion of staff members working in the field, close to trainees and clients;
- After the successive 2-3 times employment of the self-assessment by the same team of evaluators who gain experience is recommended to include new evaluators in order to have continuity in approach and thinking;
- Structuring of training and curriculum according to a label that works towards enhancing the college as an organization oriented towards sustainability in the provision of educational spaces, in the efforts to save resources and the

- capacity to intercept creative responses in the resolution of themes within educational spaces;
- Develop an internet platform where learners are able to demonstrate their advancements in terms of sustainability and demonstrate how they are interactively caring for their environment. This includes sharing interesting links on environmental issues, contributing expert contact information, announcing events which are taking place as well as suggesting and recommending literature and relevant texts. These types of platforms allow students to become more aware of practical experiences by providing the opportunity to get involved in projects, allows them to safeguard their environmental future and therefore increase employability in the long run.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper the development of the eQvet-us framework and practice set under the EQAVET framework is evidenced. Development is supported by the project “*European Quality Assurance in VET towards new Eco Skills and Environmentally Sustainable Economy*” (acronym eQvet-us).

The eQvet-us framework is based on the 3 pillars of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, embedded in the 7 social responsibility (SR) core subjects referenced in *ISO26000*. There are 61 indicators which support implementation in an organization, by employment of the practice set.

The implementation of the eQvet-us products in CET is discussed in detail, and the results are analysed. The evaluation of the eQvet-us quality indicator appreciates a “good level” for implementation of sustainability in CET. An improvement plan is elaborated with action on different terms. Than a series of good practices, lessons learnt and strategies for implementing have been formulated.

Our final conclusion is that by involving CET college in this European project it has gained experience that takes out from routine and allows it to reanalyse its place in the community, on the three strands of sustainable development.

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