



**Project: BEQUAL.app**  
**Benchmarking for Quality Assurance**  
**in Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning (WBL)**

Project n° 2018-1-LT01-KA202-046939

–

***Summary of the Development of the Benchmarking Tools  
for Quality Assurance in WBL***

–

Dr. Verena Watzek & Prof. Dr. Regina H. Mulder  
University of Regensburg, Germany  
December 2020

**In cooperation with Project Partners**

Kaunas Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (KCCIC), Lithuania  
IDEC, Greece

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI),  
Slovenia Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (ASOO),  
Croatia

Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts (HOK), Croatia

Finance & Banking, Organisational & HR development Association (EffeBi), Italy  
European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB), Germany



Funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

## Background and Aims

The topic of quality assurance in apprenticeships and WBL is of international importance (Council of the European Union, 2013). However, different European countries face different challenges in implementing quality assurance in WBL, such as unemployment, migration or quantitative and qualitative discrepancy between demand and supply at labour market. However, it should be ensured that apprenticeships and WBL have an added value for the employer and the apprentice, respectively the participant of WBL. It is therefore important to assess quality of apprenticeships and WBL.

The project “Benchmarking for quality assurance in apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) (BEQUAL.app)” was realised by different partners of various European countries (Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia). The aim was to support educational institutions and companies providing WBL in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in their attempt to realise quality assurance in WBL. To achieve this aim two benchmarking tools for quality assurance in WBL were developed, one for educational institutions and one for companies providing WBL. This summary provides information on the development of the benchmarking tools<sup>1</sup>.

As it is known that there are different tools in VET, we want to emphasise the value of our (BEQUAL.app) benchmarking tools compared to previous ones. Our tools focus on WBL and includes the interests of all stakeholders in the VET system, that are part of the different layers in the education system: the political and institutional framework, the organisation and the teaching-learning arrangement (Nieuwenhuis, Mulder, & Van Berkel, 2004).

In order to consider the different perspectives of stakeholders in VET system, it is necessary that our tool is built on a common understanding of quality assurance in WBL. The project partners together developed the definition of WBL that fits to the different VET systems in European countries. The definition of WBL is: *WBL is formal organised learning where the content is relevant for current and future jobs, can take place in the company, educational institutions or in form of simulation, and is part of a (vocational) education programme for young students or adults.* For a common understanding of quality in WBL, we built on the understanding of quality as a relative concept developed by Harvey and Green (1993). For example, quality is relative to the user of the term (in our case the different stakeholders) and the purpose for which it is used (in our case quality assurance for WBL). In addition, the authors developed five distinct but interrelated ways of thinking about quality: Quality as (1) exceptional, (2) as perfection (or consistency), as (3) fitness for purpose, as (4) value for money, and as (5) transformative. These five were considered for the development of the benchmarking tools.

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information see Watzek & Mulder (accepted)

The development of our benchmarking tools includes in particular the development of two benchmarking questionnaires with quality indicators for quality assurance in WBL. In the following method section, the development of these quality indicators is briefly described. The different phases resulted in 40 categorised quality indicators, that are part of the two benchmarking questionnaires.

## Method

The quality indicators were developed by using method triangulation (cf. Flick, 2011) with different phases: (1) review (*December 2018 – April 2019*), (2) validation (*May 2019 – September 2019*), and (3) piloting (*October 2019*).

### **Review**

The aim of the review was to identify commonalities in the diversity of existing quality assurance frameworks for WBL in VET in Europe. A literature search, with the help of all project partners was conducted, which led to a collection of different frameworks and Erasmus+-projects on quality and quality assurance in WBL. The search culminated in a collection of frameworks, which we structured according to the different institutions of the European Union (European Parliament and Council, CEDEFOP, European Youth Forum) for a better overview. The frameworks chosen for the analysis cover the needs and interests of all stakeholders in the VET system. The selected documents for the analysis are the following:

- Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (Council of the European Union, 2014)
- Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council of the European Union, 2018)
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009)
- EQAVET Quality Cycle (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), 2020)
- EQAVET Building Blocks WBL (European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), 2012)
- Towards a European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning: Best Practices and Trade Union Contributions (European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), 2013)
- European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships (European Youth Forum, 2011)
- ISO 9001 Standard (International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 2014)
- EFQM-Model (European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), 2013)

The analysis of the documents (frameworks) led to the attempt to work out commonalities and resulted in an overview of 79 quality indicators, which cover the needs and interests of the different stakeholders in the VET system.

### **Validation**

The aim of the validation was to validate the quality indicators developed in the review and to reduce the number of indicators in order to ensure their practical applicability. In order to achieve the aim a survey was conducted, in which participants had to rate the 79 indicators resulting from the review according to their importance for quality assurance in WBL in different European countries on a 5-point Likert scale (1= not important; 5=very important). The validation was carried out by external stakeholders. In total 36 external stakeholders filled out the questionnaire (Croatia=7; Slovenia=8; Italy=3; Greece=4, Lithuania=5, Germany=7; unknown=2). The stakeholders worked for example for VET schools, organisations providing post-secondary initial or continuing VET, companies providing WBL, policy makers, or employees in chambers of commerce, crafts, or industry. Moreover, the indicators were analysed by an internationally recognised researcher in the field of VET and the respective project partners in focus groups at the project meeting. Here indicators were selected systematically according to content and methodological criteria. The validation led to a list of 51 quality indicators, which were formulated in action-oriented statements and provided a solid basis for the piloting presented in the next chapter.

### **Piloting**

The aim of the piloting was to explore to what extent the quality indicators (=formulated action-oriented statements) apply to the current situation in the different countries. This step was necessary to achieve a further reduction of the indicators, and also to categorise them so that their practical applicability is guaranteed. In total 66 participants filled out the questionnaire (Austria=2; Croatia=33; Germany=6; Greece=3; Lithuania=14; Romania=1; Slovenia=6; unknown=1) by answering the questions with a 4-point Likert scale answering mode (1=not at all true; 4=completely true). 33 respondents (e.g., teachers, training coordinators, vocational trainers and mentors) filled out the questionnaire for educational institutions and 33 respondents (e.g., managing directors or managers of human resources development) for companies. On the basis of this information further quality indicators could be deleted so that in the end 40 quality indicators remained.

## **Result**

This procedure resulted in 40 quality indicators in seven different categories. All these 40 indicators are inserted in both benchmarking questionnaires. Below, the seven categories with for each two examples of indicators are listed<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Further information can be found on the platform (<https://bequal.info>) where the complete questionnaires with all categorised quality indicators are presented: (a) BE-Tool\_Questionnaire\_WBL for Companies and (b) BE-Tool\_Questionnaire\_WBL for Educational Institutions

1. Relation with VET system
  - Our WBL programme is certified by national or regional institutions.
  - Our WBL programme is in accordance with a larger vocational educational programme.
2. Characteristics of WBL programme
  - Required facilities for WBL are available in our organisation.
  - Students participating in our WBL programme have the possibility for mobility in our country.
3. Focus on students
  - Our WBL is in accordance with the students' expectations.
  - Our organisation offers equal opportunities in the access to our WBL programme.
4. Communication and agreements between partners
  - National Institutions or other relevant stakeholders in our country support our organisation regarding WBL.
  - We communicate with educational institutions/companies on student achievements in WBL.
5. Monitoring and assessment
  - Our organisation systematically monitors and evaluates our WBL.
  - We measure student's satisfaction on WBL.
6. WBL trainers/teachers
  - Our managers/leaders take responsibility for WBL in our organisation.
  - Our WBL trainers/teachers have all required competences for WBL.
7. Future perspectives in WBL
  - Our WBL programme contains future needs of the labour market.
  - Our organisation continuously improves the WBL programme.

## Implications for the use of benchmarking tools

Our benchmarking tools are beneficial compared to other tools, as we have integrated the interests of the various stakeholders in the VET system as well as all five quality perspectives developed by Harvey and Green (1993), which are often quoted but not systematically applied. The tools can be used by all kinds of organisations providing WBL (in industry and educational institutions, but also hospitals, banks, etc.). The gain of using our benchmarking tools can be summarised in four aspects: (1) The user can improve their awareness in relation to what the quality indicators are; (2) The user can see where he/she stands – in terms of fulfilling quality standards at a low or high level; (c) The user can compare the situation in his/her own organisation with that of others in the same country, but also compare it internationally. (d) The information provided by the use of the tools can be used as a basis for changes to improve quality of WBL. For instance, the choice can be made to focus on improving those topics (related to indicators) that have a low score, or that have a lower score than other comparable organisations, or that are currently playing an important role (for instance in a country). Different stakeholders

(including apprentices) can be involved in these decision-making processes. Finally, it is recommended to use the benchmarking tools in the long term to compare scores in time to see whether a particular topic in WBL has improved, for instance as a consequence of a measure taken after the first benchmark result. In order to use our tools, visit our platform BEQUAL.info (<https://bequal.info>).

## References

Council of the European Union (2013). European alliance for apprenticeships – Council declaration. Online: [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/139011.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/139011.pdf) (20.02.2020).

Council of the European Union (2014). Council recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships. Online: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327(01)) (24.08.2020).

Council of the European Union (2018). Council recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. Online: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0502\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0502(01)&from=EN) (15.03.2020).

European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) (2013). EFQM Model. Online: <http://www.efqm.org/> (18.02.2020).

European Parliament and Council (2009). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. Online: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708(01)&from=EN) (15.03.2020).

European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (2012). Quality assuring work-based learning. Online: <https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/publications/EQAVET-Quality-assuring-work-based-learning.pdf?ext=.pdf> (20.02.2020).

European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (2020). EQAVET Indicators' Toolkit. Online: <https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/For-VET-System/Monitoring-your-System/Evaluation> (20.02.2020).

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) (2013). Towards a European quality framework for apprenticeship and work-based learning: best practices and trade union contributions. Online: [https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/Documents/ETUC-Towards-a-European-quality-framework-for-apprenticeship-and-work-based-learning-\(1\).pdf](https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/Documents/ETUC-Towards-a-European-quality-framework-for-apprenticeship-and-work-based-learning-(1).pdf) (20.02.2020).

European Youth Forum (2011). European Quality Charter on Internships & Apprenticeships. Online: <https://www.youthforum.org/european-quality-charter-internships-and-apprenticeships> (24.08.2020).

Flick, U. (2011). *Triangulation – eine Einführung* (3. Aufl.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Harvey, L. & Green, D. (1993). Defining Quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9-34.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (2014). *Quality management systems - Requirements*. Online: <https://www.iso.org/obp/> (15.03.2020).

Nieuwenhuis, L. F. M., Mulder, R. H., & Van Berkel, H. (2004). Improving the quality of teaching-learning arrangements in VET. In W. J. Nijhof & W. van Esch (Eds), *Unravelling policy, power, process and performance: the formative evaluation of the dutch adult and vocational education act* (pp. 135-146). Hertogenbosch: CINOP.

Watzek, V. & Mulder, R. H. (accepted). Qualitätssicherung beim Lernen am Arbeitsplatz für berufliche Bildungseinrichtungen und Unternehmen in Europa – Entwicklung und Kategorisierung von Qualitätsindikatoren. *bwp@ Berufs- und Wirtschaftspädagogik* – online.