

## Background paper

The key focus for this Peer Learning Activity (PLA) organised by the Dutch EQAVET NRP is enhancing quality culture in VET. The reason for organising this PLA is that we as an NRP believe in educating one another about specific themes and that we would like to apply that strategy to a theme that the Netherlands has been dealing with for a while now, and that we feel requires further action. We would like to focus on sharing insights that each of us has gained in our own respective countries, and to enrich and add to these insights. This is not necessarily aimed at jointly establishing a shared definition of what a quality culture should be, but rather seeks to gather the various insights into what can be done to enhance the quality culture with regard to actually delivering quality.

### Background

In the Netherlands, we have already observed that senior secondary vocational education (MBO) institutions have implemented their quality cycles, but that it has proven difficult to complete those cycles at all the different levels. In 2012, we finished the so-called NLQAVET project ([www.nlqavet.nl](http://www.nlqavet.nl)), in which we took various quality assurance systems and connected them with implementations that aim to create a lasting improvement to the quality of senior secondary vocational education. Enhancing the quality culture within MBO institutions is key in this respect. We have been doing this for a few years now and, together with our stakeholders, have made real progress with regards to enhancing quality culture. Now, we would like to share this progress with our European colleagues. Together, we hope that we can take this to the next level. This PLA focuses on the VET provider level. We will give special attention to the review phase of the quality cycle and the use of student and graduate feedback to improve quality. This will be linked to EQAVET indicators number 4, 5 and 6.

### Explanation of the theme of quality culture enhancement

The website [www.EQAVET.eu](http://www.EQAVET.eu) provides us with definitions of QA and we will use these definitions in the PLA.

#### *Quality assurance:*

Quality assurance is an organisation's guarantee that the product or service it offers meets the accepted quality standards. It is achieved by identifying what 'quality' means in context, specifying methods by which its presence can be ensured and specifying ways in which it can be measured to ensure conformance.

#### *Quality assurance in VET:*

Activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements of stakeholders.

#### *Quality cycle, the Plan-Do-Check-Act-cycle (PDCA-cycle):*

A systematic series of steps for gaining valuable learning and knowledge for the continual improvement of a product or process. The cycle begins with the Plan step. This involves identifying a goal or purpose, formulating a theory, defining success metrics and putting a plan into action.

These activities are followed by the Do step, in which the components of the plan are implemented, such as making a product. Next comes the Study step, where outcomes are monitored to test the validity of the plan for signs of progress and success, or problems and areas for improvement. The Act step closes the cycle, integrating the learning generated by the entire process, which can be used to adjust the goal, change methods or even reformulate a theory altogether. These four steps are repeated over and over as part of a never-ending cycle of continual improvement (see PDCA cycle and EQAVET quality cycle).

*Quality culture, two definitions:*

1. a tool for asking questions about how things work, how institutions function, whom they relate to and how they see themselves;
2. individual and collective commitment to VET quality maintenance and improvement.

In the Netherlands, the main focus lies on the second definition of quality culture. In our view, a quality culture is essential for a focus on continuous improvement. It is a culture in which teachers, managers and staff are able to learn and develop in order to improve the quality of education. To be able to improve the education, it is important to give and receive feedback, especially from stakeholders, such as students and graduates.

### **Key questions for the PLA**

In preparing this PLA, we have established a number of key questions that we feel should stand at the core of the discussions that we will be having with each other. At the start of the PLA, we will jointly consider whether these are indeed the key questions when it comes to enhancing quality culture.

We have linked the questions to the phases of the quality cycle, where each question focuses on the effect that phase has on quality.

1. Plan:
  - a. In what way do teachers contribute to the establishment of goals?
2. Implementation:
  - a. In what way do teachers contribute to the implementation of remedial or other actions?
  - b. In what way does the staff (i.e. management and specialised policy officers) contribute to the implementation of remedial or other actions?
3. Evaluation:
  - a. What information is gathered about the quality of education?
  - b. What connection is there between the quality of the gathered information and how it is used by teachers?
4. Review:
  - a. In what way do teachers contribute to the utilisation of the gathered information in drafting and implementing improvement proposals?
  - b. In what way does the staff contribute to the utilisation of the gathered information in drafting and implementing improvement proposals?
  - c. In what way do students contribute to the deliberation on improvement proposals?
  - d. In what way do graduates contribute to the deliberation on improvement proposals?

The final questions relate to the competences required for teachers and staff:

1. What competences should teachers have in order to complete the entire quality cycle (including the review phase)?
2. What competences should staff have in order to complete the entire quality cycle (including the review phase)?
3. What competences should the team of teachers have in order to complete the entire quality cycle (including the review phase)?