

Q Days report – paying attention to quality culture and educational quality

In the European VET Skills week, the EQAVET national coordination point (NCP EQAVET) organised the Q Days. These days took place on 24 November 2017 in Den Bosch and on 28 November 2017 in Zwolle. The aim was to share the experiences we at NCP EQAVET have had with our partners, to inspire participants and to have colleagues exchange thoughts on improving the quality of education and enhancing quality culture. The Q Days proved energising, inspiring those who attended, and offered a meaningful exchange on the quality of education and quality culture. It was nice to see that the subject continues to arouse interest and is evolving. There were some 65 participants from government-funded institutions and from non-government-funded institutions, the Dutch Education Inspectorate, the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (*MBO Raad*) and the Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (*Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven, SBB*).

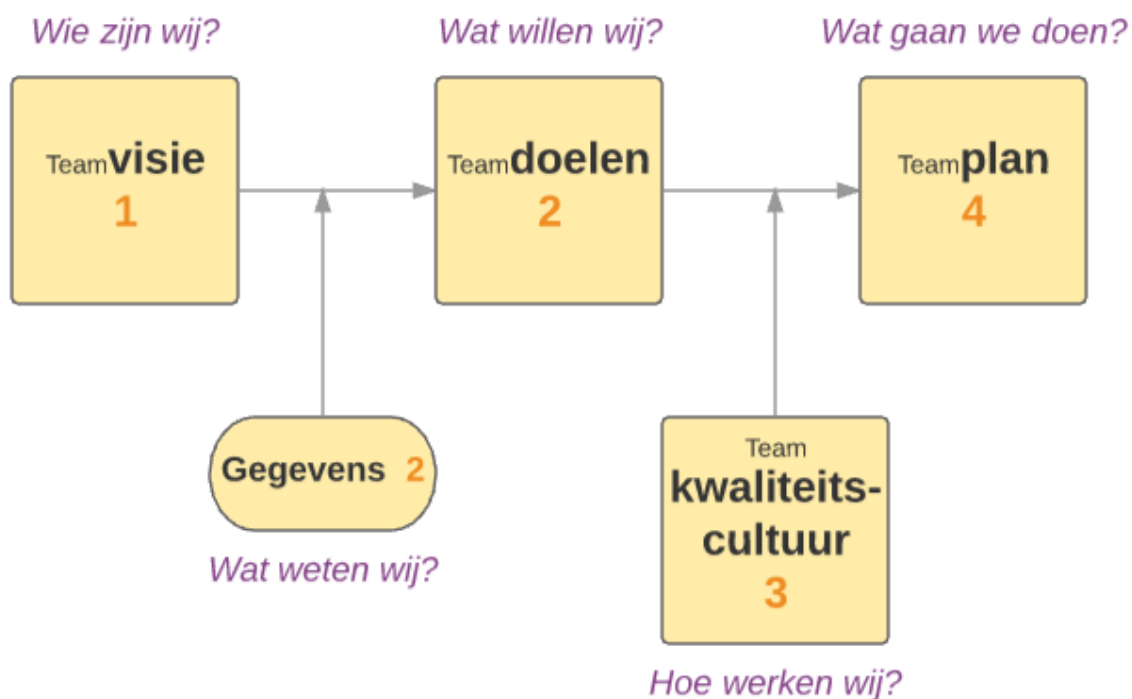
The initial exchange was sparked by questions that participants raised based on their experiences in practice. This led to discussions based on five themes intended to find answers to these questions and to formulate new ones to continue with. The participants conducted inspiring conversations with one another and as the day passed managed to find answers to many of their questions. The day ended with drawing up concrete action points for improving quality culture. What's more, people even gained new contacts to keep discussions about certain themes going after the Q Days.

Planning pilots on team quality portraits

The National Coordination Point for EQAVET (NCP Eqavet) used an interview to provide participants with greater insight into the structure and results of the pilots aimed at enhancing quality culture in teacher teams. The NCP EQAVET developed an approach in which teams are supervised in creating what is referred to as a team quality portrait. This approach is in line with the ten insights as outlined in the [publication](#) of the MBO Quality Network (*Kwaliteitsnetwerk mbo*) and the NCP EQAVET on enhancing quality culture. The aim of the approach was to generate greater insight into the quality culture of a team, how this contributes to the educational quality it delivers and how a team can actually address working cyclically on improving educational quality.

The two pilots were conducted in the autumn of 2017, involving two teacher teams, one at ROC Leeuwenborgh and one at AOC Oost. After having concluded the pilot, the teams indicated that they had undertaken concrete measures to enhance their educational quality and quality culture, and they were positive about the approach. The team members experienced greater unity and solidarity as a team and felt more secure together. The teams were also more aware of what they wanted to tackle together and set priorities based on this. The teams thus took further steps in elaborating the quality assurance cycle. Working on quality has become something the team itself actually embraces and not just an objective found in documents or only pursued by the team manager. The teams indicate that the approach requires a certain stage of development of the team and that it remains difficult to actually bring about changes in the team behaviour. Enhancing quality culture has many facets that require specific preparation and a team-tailored approach suited to their specific context, current way of working and collaborating, and quality issues at hand.

The approach comprises four half-days. The basic structure has the following subjects being addressed during these half-days:



In preparation for half-days 1 and 3, all team members complete a scan: a scan on the vision on educational quality and a scan on quality culture.

Based on the results of the evaluation, the NCP EQAVET will be further developing the approach. In January 2018, the NCP will publish a policy document on the digital scans and other support material. In 2018, the NCP EQAVET will be working together with the expert group of the MBO Quality Network on developing further activities related to this theme.

Results of the discussion rounds

During the Q Days, participants discussed the following five themes together:

Theme 1: Enhancing quality culture

Theme 2: Professionalisation in light of enhancing quality culture

Theme 3: Staff satisfaction and experienced work pressure

Theme 4: Student commitment

Theme 5: Quality assurance regarding work placements abroad

These themes were discussed in carousel format, in four rounds in which a well-informed discussion leader from our partners and the NCP EQAVET provided input and inspiration related to the theme. The colleagues present then had a good discussion about the theme in question.

Below is a brief summary per theme of the most important points which were discussed in the thematic rounds. The results can be found in the appendix to this report.

Theme 1: Enhancing quality culture

The starting point for this discussion was formed by the ten insights on enhancing quality culture. These insights were included in the document published in early October 2017 by the MBO Quality Network and the NCP EQAVET.

It is important for working on quality culture to be embedded in the entire process of an institution. Working on quality culture works best if a team itself aspires to this. They determine what they work on, incorporate this in their team activities plan and thus take ownership of their quality culture. A clear assignment provided by management has a supporting effect, so this must be facilitated by management.

What can we as quality officers, quality coordinators or policy officers do about this?

Many of the participants asked themselves this question and provided answers which especially stressed how important it is to engage the team directly, to build trust and to help formulate a clear assignment based on a positive approach. If you wish to raise team members' consciousness regarding quality culture, the following are excellent questions: *What is quality culture to you?* and *How do you know whether you are providing this?*

As a quality assurance officer, it is necessary to realise that you yourself are part of the quality culture. When you are supervising a team, provide process supervision, but have the teams take responsibility. They are the owners. If you have a team that others can learn from, organise a meeting with other teams to inspire them with this example of good practice.

Theme 2: Professionalisation in light of enhancing quality culture

Enhancing quality culture requires a teaching team to have the right attitude and skills. This can concern such matters as engaging in dialogue with one another, being able to work towards a goal, realising the benefit of solidarity, establishing priorities, being committed, accepting feedback, and using data and information to develop new activities (PDCA). If a team does not have the required capabilities, supervision can help. This can be by professionalisation, in various forms.

Experience shows that in team supervision there are a number of factors that will lead to success in a professionalisation process aimed at enhancing quality culture, such as:

- the entire team being present
- management support and facilitation
- a clear picture of the initial situation to ensure a customised approach
- establishing clear goals, relating these to concrete results and behaviour
- clear team assignments (provided by supervisor) and proper preparation
- addressing themes which are directly relevant to a team to increase motivation
- raising visibility of changes by feedback from outsiders, 360-degree feedback, team scans, etc.
- interim evaluations of the professionalisation process and looking ahead towards follow-up
- collaboration between quality assurance, HR, management and team.

For more tips and further explanation, see the appendix to this report for Theme 2.

Theme 3: Staff satisfaction and experienced work pressure

All institutions conduct a biennial staff satisfaction survey. The data at institution level are publicly available from the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges. Recently the ECBO expertise centre for

vocational education and training conducted a [study](#) into the work pressure experienced by VET teachers, which revealed that 75% experience high work pressure. Earlier, a [literature study](#) was conducted by Wageningen University and the ECBO expertise centre for vocational education and training on VET staff satisfaction. The following answers came to the fore in answer to the question of what makes staff satisfied with their work:

Personal resources:

- Motivation for the profession
- Self-confidence
- Teachers' job satisfaction is in part connected to the faith that teachers have in students
- Didactic and pedagogical baggage

Resources within the organisation:

- Manager/supervisor – is he/she able to provide transformational management/supervision (role model, inspiration, content-related encouragement, secure environment)
- Close connections with colleagues and management
- Scope for professionalisation
- Participation in social activities within the organisation

Demands made of work:

- Appointment – part-time appointments lead to more stress which leads to lower job satisfaction or to combinations with working in another organisation
- Supervision in educational innovation
- Combination of various types of duties

Conversations with participants showed that staff satisfaction surveys (SSSs) yield a wealth of information which can provide useful input for working on quality culture and educational quality. In many institutions, discussing the results of SSSs occurs in a cycle running alongside the quality assurance cycle. SSSs are often administered by HRM, and the relationship with quality assurance and the quality cycle at team level is only partially addressed. The involvement of quality assurance officers in analysing and discussing SSS data at institutional and team level turned out to be limited for Q Days participants.

The SSS data at institutional and team level are important input for the quality cycle, so it is advisable that SSS results are used as a basis for entering into discussion with staff. Staff are given the opportunity to tell the whole story, can bring up thorny issues and risks, but can also explain what is going well and why this is the case. Together, you can then think of solutions or instigate action. The role of team managers is crucial for this as well. They are the ones sketching the overall plan who ensure that concrete action is undertaken that reflects that the survey results are being addressed.

Work pressure is an important issue. Proper analysis is required of the workload, annual duties and self-created work pressure. In order to encourage people taking responsibility for their own situation in this regard, investing in personal leadership is a good idea, as well as having a good impression of everyone's strengths and checking from time to time whether these are being profited from in staff's current roles or whether duties need reallocating.

Theme 4: Student commitment

The sessions with students were considered to be very valuable since ultimately the point is whether they are receiving a good education that prepares them well for the job market. The students participating were members of student councils and involved in improving educational quality. The discussions with the students showed that involving them in quality culture leads to educational improvement and even to better results.

When teachers are open to student feedback, this has a positive effect on students: teachers show that they trust them by this, that they consider them serious partners in education, and they serve as a good example of how you work on quality, which is also an important skill for novice professionals. Another additional advantage is that students can practise giving feedback, certainly if you give them instructions on how to give feedback.

Participants indicated that it is worthwhile to involve students in every phase of the PDCA cycle and not just during the evaluation. This gives them influence in designing the plans and a role in their implementation.

Theme 5: Quality assurance regarding work placements abroad

This theme group attracted fewer participants, but this allowed the discussions to go into greater depth. The ECVET indicated in which way institutions can safeguard the quality of the hosting work placement companies and work placements abroad. Another issue which was addressed was the need to learn about the quality assurance system used in other countries and the safeguards that these incorporate.

The discussions also touched upon the qualifying assessment of the learning outcomes achieved by students abroad. Since the Education Inspectorate cannot supervise educational quality and its safeguarding abroad, examinations may not take place abroad. A few possible avenues for solutions came up: having examinations in the Netherlands before and after the work placement abroad, and requesting the examination board to recognise any submitted proof and/or award exemptions. Consultation on this theme is still taking place between the ministry and the Netherlands Association of VET Colleges (in collaboration with the NCP ECVET).

The most important conclusions of the discussions were:

- Schools are competent yet unaware of this. Invest in creating awareness and in (further) competency.
- Record the points for attention regarding practical occupational training (*beroepspraktijkvorming*, BPV).
- Involve parents with regard to funding and security.
- Use existing EU instruments (MOU, ECVET, EQF).

In the experience of all of the schools that have students doing work placements abroad, the employability of such students increased after the work placement.

The ECVET experts have indicated that they are prepared to provide institutions with more information on work placements abroad and their quality assurance.

Conclusion

As is reflected by the evaluation, the participants returned home inspired and satisfied with the results. All relevant developments relating to quality culture and educational quality can be monitored via www.eqavet.nl. If you want to stay completely up to date, consider signing up for the newsletter.

Our thanks to all of the participants and moderators for all the wonderful discussions and insights exchanged!

The NCP EQAVET

Appendix – Elaboration of the flip chart sheets of the Q Days on 24 and 28 November 2017

Theme 1: Enhancing quality culture

- Interpretation of the relationship between culture – structure.
- Embed quality culture in entire process, not making it separate 'parlour trick'.
- Ownership versus self-interest – knowing that you are doing well.
- The team culture of educational change must suit evolving society.
- How can the team genes incorporate the culture of continual development?
The facilitating system is in place. There is scope to make choices. Teams can upload, but do not do so. Investigate the reasons for this!
Investigate where the team energy is located.
- Have management give a clear assignment.
- It is the teams' turn to take action, but what is the educational framework?
- Designate what the benefit is for the team. This encourages taking ownership.
- Make clear that the team activity plan is TEAM PROPERTY. They are the owners.
- Work in a biennial cycle.

What can we do as quality coordinators and quality policy officers?

- Provide support that suits the team in question.
- Coordinate with the team.
- Work on building confidence.
- Give compliments.
- Ensure that clarity regarding the assignment exists.
- Provide structure.
- Speak the same language as the team.
- Convey pride in dialogue with external parties.
- Ensure that you are in control inside organisation.
- Address teachers personally.
 - What is quality culture to you?
 - How do you know whether you are providing this?
- Consciousness: with what intention am I approaching the team (advisory, support, monitoring role)?
- I am also part of quality culture.
- Offer process supervision.
- Have teams take responsibility.
- Communicate about systems (hard controls) to teams and management.
- Organise an event to share best practices.

Theme 2: Professionalisation in light of enhancing quality culture

Summarising, tips for a professionalisation process for teams:

- Time: 20 hours, 20 weeks
- Formulate a clear starting position and goals, and evaluate.

- Is the PDCA adequate?
- Is the team health OK?
- Manage behaviour (soft controls) + systems (hard controls).
- The presence of the entire team will enhance effectiveness!
- Management role: clear time-bound facilitation, providing initial embedding, consultation with trainer during process.
- Also incorporate concrete subjects and actions which the team in any case must address → increases motivation.
- Meetings held outside the institution are more effective.
- Share successes and challenges between teams.
- Balance interests: team – line management – management – board.
- Professionalise the management too.
- Find the itch! (especially when encountering resistance)
- Ask questions related to 'Why?' and 'What do you stand for?'
- Have quality assurance work together with HR and study programme managers.

Reading tip: Lencioni: *5 frustraties van teamwork* (5 frustrations related to teamwork)

Theme 3: Staff satisfaction and experienced work pressure

- Make better use of the available information. Create connections by engaging in discussion with staff.
- Draw connections between the staff satisfaction survey and educational quality.
- Outline risks.
- The role of the team manager is crucial in this regard.
- Don't just dump conclusions in laps but draw up a plan on what to address and how to do so.
- Supervise the improvement plan.
- Invest in personal leadership.
- Establish what the strong points of team members are and ensure that these are used better.

Theme 4: Student commitment

- It works both ways: education improves and students achieve better results since they are more involved with their study programme.
- It's about attitude, whether you find it important as teacher, is quality achievable for you as teacher without student feedback, are you comfortable receiving this (don't be afraid of it), do you have enough trust in your ability as a teacher.
- If the proper attitude is present, the behaviour and skills will follow. It has to do with creating a safe atmosphere, listening, providing feedback on what is possible and what has been done with this, being able to implement changes.
- Involve students in all phases of the PDCA cycle, consult them when making and carrying out plans.
- Have students also reflect on their own contribution in evaluations: am I motivated; am I paying sufficient attention; can I concentrate; am I learning what I want to learn.
- Students must learn to provide feedback. It is about the realisation that it is possible, that it is listened to and that something is done with it. This depends on earlier experiences.
- Important subjects for students are: learning environment (how is the school, how are the rooms/spaces), social activities (e.g. school parties) and the content of the subjects/courses.
- Student council members have exemption from classes and are paid for their work.

- JOB, the association of students in senior secondary vocational education, gives courses for student council members, on subjects such as budgets.
- Quality assurance supports student councils and is in contact with management about this.

Theme 5: Quality assurance regarding work placements abroad

- Schools are competent yet unaware of this. Invest in creating awareness and competency.
- Record the points for attention regarding practical occupational training (BPV: *beroepspraktijkvorming*).
- Involve parents with regard to funding and security.
- Use existing EU instruments (MOU, ECVET, EQF).
- The employability of students increases after a work placement.

Theme 1 appendix – Key points regarding quality culture

Quality culture – definitions

- Natural, mutual and above all implicit manner in which a group attempts to achieve educational quality with regard to product and process.
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- Collective values, norms, mutual assignment of meaning and interpretation of the proper approach to good education.
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- Develops in collaborative and learning processes within groups.

Quality culture (HOW) is fertile ground on which educational quality (WHAT) can prosper.

Quality culture determines how those involved view educational quality.



A strong quality culture: 10 insights



- 1 Teacher teams are the linchpin of education quality.
- 2 Teacher teams have to be guided by a clear-cut, shared and proven vision on teaching and learning.
- 3 Teacher teams have to be outward-looking and proactively solicit feedback.
- 4 Teacher teams, supervisors and administrators have to know how the quality of their teaching stacks up.
- 5 The organisational structure has to facilitate teacher teams.
- 6 The team's collective and individual learning capacity determines the focus of improvement.
- 7 Interventions in the culture, or soft controls, have to be in balance with interventions in the structure or system, or hard controls.
- 8 Quality improvement interventions vary according to the teacher team and situation.
- 9 Exemplary behaviour has to be visible at all levels.
- 10 Acknowledging successes is the starting point for further development.

Theme 2 appendix – Key points regarding professionalisation

Key points regarding professionalisation

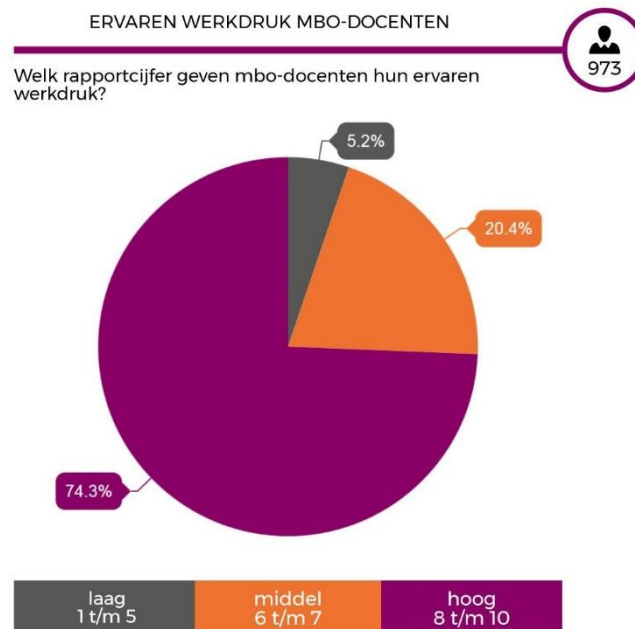
- Working on quality assurance or enhancing quality culture requires team skills. If these are lacking, teams must be professionalised in this regard.
- Professionalisation requires time; preferably at least 20 hours must be allocated, spread out over at least 20 weeks. Using half-days works well. Briefer periods are less effective.
- It is very worthwhile to also evaluate professionalisation, in addition to implementing it. Which goals were set, were these achieved and has this led to changes in behaviour in teachers and/or the team.
- Engaging in discussion with one another is felt to be worthwhile, it creates more solidarity and unity, but it requires time. Does the team realise this? Can this time be made available for this?
- It is important to pay attention to the initial situation of the team. Is the team ready to engage in dialogue about quality culture and how this contributes to quality assurance? Does the team feel good about itself? Is the team functioning well? Is the PDCA cycle of the team well established?
- For professionalisation to enhance quality culture, it is desirable that the entire team is present. Is this possible? This really must be the case in practice. Otherwise it is a pity to begin work on it. The impact is much smaller in that case.
- Active support from management is required for professionalisation.
- Ongoing consultation with management will increase its impact.
- Acquaint participants with current issues and the complexity. Have them reflect on this. Encourage team members to develop their own view.
- Connect enhancing quality culture with issues which are important and directly relevant at the time to the team. Select subjects which the team wanted in any case to address. Increase the skills of the team by addressing these subjects. This will lead to direct results, since the team has an interest, while the team simultaneously increases its skills.
- Take changes in behaviour as goal. Do not restrict the process to discussion, but translate matters to behaviour and establish together with the team how to ensure such behaviour.
- Repetition and follow-up are important. Matters often will not stick after a single occasion.
- Choose active working methods.

Theme 3 appendix – Work pressure in VET

Work pressure in VET (upper secondary vocational education and training)

In 2016, the ECBO Dutch Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ECBO) conducted a study on work pressure in VET. The study was inspired by the attention being given to work pressure in the media, where the subject was widely written upon and being discussed. However, this often related to primary education or secondary education other than upper secondary vocational education and training (VET). Although VET teachers also experience high work pressure, as reflected in, for example, research into staff satisfaction in the sector [1], research conducted by the ECBO Dutch Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training [2] and the manifesto published by the professional organisation [3].

For the Dutch Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training study, a questionnaire was completed by nearly 1000 VET teachers within a brief span of time. This indicates that the issue of work pressure is a hot topic among VET teachers. The majority of the respondents experienced high to very high work pressure (see figure). According to the respondents, this was due to a number of issues, including the time set for certain tasks, the perceived latitude to cope with the team with temporary absence of colleagues and time available to prepare for a new subject. Teachers also indicated that they experience work pressure in particular in teaching duties and in implementing innovations and educational innovation.



Source: [2]

This study is an initial exploratory study; in order to gain a greater understanding of the origin of work pressure and what the solutions are, further research is required. This interest is also noted by the Social and Economic Council (SER) in its Advice to the Minister of Education [4].

How to proceed

Work pressure is on the agenda and many teams addressing it. We support teams with research and advice regarding questions that arise, such as: What is the work pressure that we experience as a team? What is a source of pleasure related to work for our team? How do various team members view this? This is how we work on solutions together.

Sources

- [1] MBO Raad en Effectory (2015). *Medewerkersonderzoek 2014-2015. Sectorrapportage MBO branche* [2014-2015 staff survey. VET sector report]. Woerden: MBO Raad [Netherlands Association of VET Colleges].
- [2] Toly, R. van, Groot, A., Klaijssen, A. & Brouwer, P. (2017). *Ervaren werkdruk in het mbo (Factsheet en Visueel onderzoeksverslag)* [Experienced work pressure in VET. (fact sheet and visual research report)]. Den Bosch: Dutch Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training (ecbo) <http://ecbo.nl/portfolio-items/ervaren-werkdruk-mbo/>
- [3] <http://www.bvmbo.nl/manifest/>
- [4] <https://www.ser.nl/nl/publicaties/adviezen/2010-2019/2017/toekomstgericht-beroepsonderwijs.aspx>

Theme 4 appendix – Key points regarding student commitment to educational quality

- It works both ways: education improves and students achieve better results since they are more involved with their study programme.
- It's about attitude, whether you find it important as teacher, is quality achievable for you as teacher without student feedback, are you comfortable receiving this (don't be afraid of it), do you have enough trust in your ability as a teacher.
- If the proper attitude is present, the behaviour and skills will follow. It has to do with creating a safe atmosphere, listening, providing feedback on what is possible and what has been done with this, being able to implement changes.
- Involve students in all phases of the PDCA cycle, consult with them when making and carrying out plans.
- Have students also reflect on their own contribution in evaluations: am I motivated; am I paying sufficient attention; can I concentrate; am I learning what I want to learn, where can I find help?
- Students must learn to provide feedback. It is about the realisation that it is possible, that it is being heard and realising that something is done with it. This depends on earlier experiences.
- Important subjects for students are: teacher accessibility, teacher acknowledgement, learning environment (how is the school, how are the rooms/spaces), social activities (e.g. school parties) and the content of the subjects/courses.