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Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework

EUROPEAN LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICY NETWORK

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This is an independent report prepared by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), a Member-State network in receipt of EU financial support under the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+ Programme. The views expressed are those of ELGPN and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission or any person acting on behalf of the Commission.

Foreword

This publication, the Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework, is an excerpt from *the Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit*, published by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) in 2012. It is the Annex D of the Resource Kit.

The QAE Framework builds upon the work by the members of ELGPN in 2008–12, working in Work Package 4 on Quality Assurance and Evidence-base with the support of consultants Dr Deirdre Hughes 2011–12 (UK) and Prof Peter Plant 2009–10 (Denmark) and lead country representatives Dr Tibor Bors Borbély-Pecze 2011–12 (Hungary) and Steffen Jensen 2009–10 (Denmark) and partners of the ELGPN including the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), the European Forum for Student Guidance (Fedora) (now merged with the European Association for International Education – EAIE), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP), the Public Employment Services (PES) Network, the Euroguidance Network, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European Youth Forum.

Following the publication of the Resource Kit, the ELGPN member-countries continued work on Quality Assurance and Evidence-Base themes during the ELGPN Work Programmes 2013–14 and 2015 with the support of consultant Dr Deirdre Hughes and lead country representatives Jennifer McKenzie 2013–15 (Ireland) and Helia Moura and Alexandra Figueiredo 2014–15 (Portugal). The outcome of the development work is presented in the *ELGPN Tool No. 5: Strengthening the Quality Assurance and Evidence-Base for Lifelong Guidance.* This tool as well as all other ELGPN publications are available online at http://elgpn.eu.

The ELGPN worked in 2007–15 to assist the European Union Member States (and the neighbouring countries eligible for the Lifelong Learning Programme) and the European Commission in developing European co-operation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. The purpose of the Network was to promote co-operation and systems development at member-country level in implementing the priorities identified in EU 2020 strategies and EU Resolutions on Lifelong Guidance (2004; 2008). The Network was established in 2007 by the Member States; the Commission supported its activities under the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+ Programme.

The Network consisted of 32 member countries (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, TR and UK), with CH as an observer. The participating countries designated their representatives in the Network, and were encouraged to include both governmental and non-governmental representatives. As a Member-State-driven network, the ELGPN represented an innovative form of the Open Method of Co-ordination within the European Union (EU).

Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework

Quality assurance and evidence-based policies and practices to support lifelong guidance systems and services operate in six broad contexts: schools, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, adult education, employment settings, and social inclusion initiatives. This Framework is designed to build upon earlier work undertaken by the ELGPN (2009/10) and to extend this further in the form of a common set of **quality elements, criteria, indicators** and **possible sources of data** that can be utilised and further developed by policy-makers and other interested parties to jointly assess progress being made in relation to these six broad areas of lifelong guidance policy development. Some notes on the development of the Framework are included in an appendix to this Annex.

The Framework can be used:

1. As a **simple checklist,** to jointly assess and record what information, if any, already exists within your country.
2. To **list the sources of data that currently provide the type of information** which are available at national, regional and/or local levels and reflect on where gaps exist and how they can be addressed as part of a continuing improvement plan.
3. To **identify any known sources of data that could potentially be used by policy-makers** that have not been used so far in quality-assurance and impact-assessment developments within your country. This might include, for example, a PISA study report, National Youth Cohort studies, regional assessment reports on lifelong guidance services, local/regional/national kitemark results, etc.
4. To **note the context in which these quality elements, criteria and indicators are being applied,** where this is possible, i.e. schools, higher education, VET, adult education, public employment services, social inclusion initiatives.
5. To **consider whether or not there is scope for improved 'read across'** to develop more coherent and consistent lifelong guidance policies and practices.

The Framework is designed not as a 'perfect scientific approach' but rather as a useful starting-point for countries to begin a practical assessment of the extent to which they have access to available data and where the gaps are in present arrangements. It is not advisable for policy-makers to use it as a comparative assessment tool between countries. Each country has its own unique and varying set of circumstances, including diversity in size, population and geographical context, and these factors are strong influences on lifelong guidance service design and delivery.

Across Europe there are several quality-assurance and evidence-base frameworks being used or developed. This Framework is designed to support and complement these, taking into account the current data-collection and quality-assurance approaches adopted in each country. The primary aim here is to produce a European QA framework that will enable policy-makers to identify *robust* and *useful* quality assurance and evidence-based policies, including impact measures such as cost-benefits to governments and individuals. A key goal is to develop a strong culture of evidence-based policies that recognise cross-cutting themes within a lifelong guidance policy context.

Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework

COUNTRY:

KEY CONTACT PERSON:

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POLICY SECTOR: (1) Schools; (2) VET; (3) Higher Education;
(4) Adult Education; (5) Employment; (6) Social Inclusion

COMPLETED BY

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COMPLETION DATE:

REVIEWED BY

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Quality Element	Criteria	Indicator	Examples of Possible Data	Policy Review Comments
1. Practitioner competence	1.1. Recognised qualifications relevant to careers sector	**Qualification level specified[1]** • **Careers sector requirements** % fully qualified % partially qualified % non-qualified below a certain level	• National regulations / legislative requirements • Careers professionals national register • Provider reports • Funder reports • Government database	
	1.2. Engaged in continuing professional development	**Nos. of CPD hours undertaken in 1 year** at a: • careers practitioner level[2] • manager of career development services level[3] **Nos. signed up to a professional code of ethics** at a: • careers practitioner level	• National database • Outsourcing reports • National kitemark • National quality standards report(s) • Application of CEDEFOP Competence Framework (2009) • Inspection report(s) • National kitemark • National quality standards report(s) • National register of careers practitioners	
	1.3. Membership level of careers professional association(s)	**Total in careers sector workforce** • **% members of careers professional association(s)** e.g. membership of 1; 2; 3; 3+	• Policy reports • Provider reports • Inspection reports • Careers professional association(s) • Self-reporting	

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[1]   Please note specific details, where possible, in your response within the comments section.

[2]   Please comment on the requirements for CPD and name of the organisation or government department that sets this specific requirement.

[3]   Please comment on the requirements for CPD and name of the organisation or government department that sets this specific requirement.

Quality Element	Criteria	Indicator	Examples of Possible Data	Policy Review Comments
2. Citizen/user involvement	2.1. Ease of access to relevant services and products	**Actual numbers of citizens/ users accessing the services:** • **on the web** (*nos. of visits including differing types of careers support services being accessed*); • **by telephone** (*nos. of callers*); • **individual sessions** (*nos. of clients*); • **group sessions** (*nos. of clients*)	• Careers practitioner and management data, including time spent on searches and IP address • on-line and updated career portfolios • service performance reports and self-reporting, e.g. in-house systems, ICT tracking systems e.g. Google Analytics action planning reports	
		Specific policy and targets set for equality and diversity in service design and delivery • % of citizens from diverse backgrounds representing their views on careers service design and delivery	• Records of clients' involvement in careers service design and delivery • Equality and diversity policy • Client self-reporting • Inspection reports	
		Careers dedicated staff to client ratio e.g. *nos. of clients in set time period* divided by *nos. of staff hours in set time period.*	• Human resource data • Client throughput data • Practitioner feedback reports	
		Cost per intervention e.g. *nos of staff hours and overhead costs divided by nos. of differing types of interventions.*	• Management information, e.g. datasets on differing types of interventions, including timings and costs	
	2.2. Client satisfaction with services provided, including level of awareness in differing sectors e.g. schools, VET, HE, adult education, employment settings, and social inclusion initiatives.	**An agreed level of client satisfaction expressed as a percentage** *(%)* **Follow-up telephone or online surveys at agreed set intervals** *e.g. 3, 6 and/or 12 months+*	• Client satisfaction surveys online and off-line • Appointment lead-in times • Practitioner and/or independent evaluation surveys	
		An up-to-date customer charter or entitlement statement	• Quality kitemark • Client survey response	
	2.3. Participation of users in planning and programming of service's activities and action plan	**An agreed percentage of citizen/end-user representatives informing the management team** responsible for the annual and long-term planning	• Annual planning with quantitative and qualitative set targets • Action plan • Minutes of meeting of the board of directors etc • Focus group reports	
	2.4. Participation of users in self and external evaluation of the service	**An agreed level of user participation in follow-up evaluation surveys** **An agreed percentage of user representatives involved in controlling bodies**	• Client evaluation surveys • External evaluation reports (e.g. ISO reports) • Quality standards feedback reports	

Quality Element	Criteria	Indicator	Examples of Possible Data	Policy Review Comments
3. Service provision and improvement	3.1. Learning and applying career management skills (CMS)	**Learning outcomes related to specific aspects of CMS** *e.g. career management competencies linked to national 'Blueprint' for CMS*	• Pre- and post- treatment assessment/ evaluations	
	3.2. Quality management system (QMS)[4]	**Evidence of a QMS to an agreed national common standard** to include measures of: (i) *practitioner competence;* (ii) *citizen/user involvement;* (iii) *connectivity to education and labour markets;* (iv) *benchmarking and actions for continuing improvement*	• Inspection and audits in-house, as well as by independent verifier • Self-reporting • Client usage figures and satisfaction surveys • Labour market intelligence reports • Online LMI portal data • Human resource information	
	3.3. Appropriate ICT tools and software	**Level of financial investment in ICT equipment and software** *e.g. break down of actual costs compared to previous year*	• Expenditure costs • Assessment reports on 'added-value returns'	
	3.4. Up-to-date knowledge in and expertise of education and labour markets	**Level of investment in labour market information resources and training** *e.g. access to national, EU and international databases on learning and work opportunities/ qualification equivalences/ job descriptions* *e.g. breakdown of costs for developing on-line and off-line publications and materials* *e.g. staff time spent on LMI training and resource developments compared with option of buying in consultancy expertise*	• Expenditure costs • Assessment reports on added value returns	
	3.5. Profile and characteristics of service user groups *(clearly defined, linked to policy target groups)*	**Level of investment in staff training** *e.g. %/nos. of staff trained and associated costs* *e.g. on-the-job training; HEI training; other.* *e.g. %/nos. of staff supported to attend conferences and CPD events, and associated costs* *e.g. %/nos. of staff investing in their own attendance at conferences and CPD events*	• In-house training audit system	

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4   This may refer to a national, sectoral, service and/or provider setting.

Quality Element	Criteria	Indicator	Examples of Possible Data	Policy Review Comments
4. Cost-benefits to governments	4.1. Immediate, medium and long-term savings to public purse from specific forms of interventions[5]	**Percentage of users progressing into employment, education/ training, un-employed,** including evidence of follow-up	• Destination measures • NEET monitoring system • Balance Score Card system • Longitudinal studies • Control group studies	
		Duration and rate of progression into learning and/or work *e.g. duration of time spent on unemployment register or prolonged staying on rates in education.*	• Register of clients • Breakdown of intervention measures • Costs or cost savings linked to telephone or web-based approaches • Pre- and post-treatment assessments	
		Keeping track of the progress of individual advisees to the next stage of their employment, career path or of the education and training process *e.g. nos of individuals no longer claiming benefits as a direct result of specific intervention* *e.g. nos of reduced drop-out rates from schooling, further education and/or higher education institutions and cost implications* *e.g. transfer rates from NEETs into education, training and/or employment.*		
	4.2. Savings on expenditure • national telephone helpline service • national web portal for careers service • face-to-face delivery	• Annual expenditure costs on: *e.g. national telephone helpline service* *e.g. national web portal for careers service* *e.g. face-to-face delivery*	• Audit report • Business accounts	
5. Cost-benefits to individuals	5.1. Increase in household income	**Reduced dependency on welfare benefits through employment** *e.g. higher earnings / salary information captured by careers practitioners*	• Annual performance and reporting plans	

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[5]   Section 4 can be adapted to focus on a range of differing lifelong guidance interventions, including cost-benefit returns to employers and government(s).

Appendix to QAE Framework

A number of different quality-assurance (QA) models have been applied to the planning, management and delivery of career guidance services. These include approaches that seek to:

- standardise the process of organisational self-assessment[6];
- measure the effectiveness of careers information, advice and guidance based upon 'ideal input' factors[7];
- gather evidence to demonstrate accountability[8];
- distinguish between the various input, process and outcome factors involved in the delivery of careers information, advice and guidance[9];
- apply a model of quality assurance to careers information, advice and guidance (i.e. career professionals working together to produce a customer service charter and procedures for guaranteeing desired quality standards).[10]

Although these theoretical approaches differ in the detail of their content and application, quality assurance is often conceptualised in terms of inputs, processes and outcomes. In general, there are at least three broad approaches to ensuring the quality of careers education, information, guidance and counselling:

1. **Quality assurance of service delivery by organisations (***National Standard***).** The purpose here is to quality-assure the delivery of careers education, information, guidance and counselling services: for example, through a national customised standard (e.g. Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, UK). The role of government is to formally endorse or 'smile upon' such a national standard as an indicator of quality and a hallmark for consumer/customer protection. In general, employers take responsibility for leading on the design and implementation of a national standard 'kitemark', with input from professional associations regarding practitioner competence.

2. **Quality assurance of provision in schools colleges, training providers and universities (***Regional or Local Awards/Charter Mark***).** The purpose here is to quality-assure the provision of careers education, information, guidance and/or counselling services at a regional or local level. The role of government is to incentivise institutions to want to work towards a regional/local quality award linked to their continuing

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6   The EFQM Excellence Model is said to be the most widely used framework for organisational self-assessment in Europe and has become the basis for the majority of national and regional quality awards. For further details, see: http://www.guidance-research.org/EG/ip/theory/tp/efqm

7   Mayston, D. (2002). *Evaluating the Benefits of Guidance.* Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

8   Sampson, J.P., Reardon, R.C., Peterson, G.W. & Lenz, J.G. (2004). *Career Counseling and Services: a Cognitive Information Processing Approach,* Chapter 14. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

9   den Boer, P., Mittendorf, K., Scheerens, J. & Sjenitzer, T. (2005). *Indicators and Benchmarks for Lifelong Guidance.* Thessaloniki: Cedefop.

10   Evangelista, L. (2003). Quality assurance in guidance services – a tri-variable model. *Professionalità Journal,* No. 78. Italy: Editrice la Scula. See http://ww.orientamento.it/orientamento/tri-varibale.pdf

improvement plan (CIP) and external inspection frameworks. Employers have responsibility for implementation of CIP; careers professionals have a role to perform in contributing to evidence on the impact of careers and guidance-related interventions.

3. **Quality assurance of individual careers professionals (*Professional Standards*).** The purpose here is to assure users of the service that individual careers professionals are working to an agreed code of ethics and common professional standards.

The QAE Framework builds upon a series of ongoing piloting and development activities undertaken in 2011–12. At least seven Member States have successfully piloted and refined the QAE Framework within their national careers policy developments. This included capturing data and identifying gaps in existing evidence and impact measures. The work also draws upon other findings from relevant EU frameworks[11] and global professional standards[12]. In addition, earlier studies on evidence-based guidance policies[13] were analysed, and relevant overseas policies and practices[14] were scrutinised.

A complementary evidence-based approach to measuring the learning outcomes from career interventions was also piloted by ELGPN. The Careers Service Impact Inventory is designed to assess client needs and responses. This is currently being tested in Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Portugal and Slovenia, as described in Case Study 6.6 in Section 6.

[11] For example: Cedefop (2009). *Professionalising Career Guidance in Europe.* Panorama Series 164. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

[12] For example: International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (2003). *International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners.*

[13] For example: Maguire, M. & Killeen, J. (2003). *Outcomes from Career Information and Guidance Services.* Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

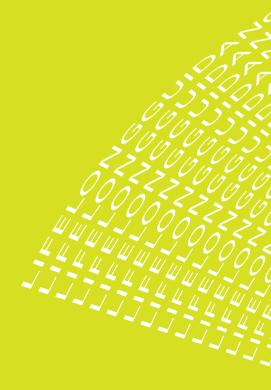[14] For example: Canadian Standards for Career Development Practitioners.

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