QualiTraining

A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education

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[1] The 33 member states of the Enlarged Partial Agreement of the ECML are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", United Kingdom.

QualiTraining – A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education

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A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education (QualiTraining)

Brief Project Description

Starting point

There is growing interest in national and regional contexts for standard-setting in areas such as evaluation, approaches to quality control and management. In the first medium-term programme the ECML project "Quality Assurance and Self-assessment for Schools and Teachers" developed a CD-Rom entitled "Quality Management in Language Education". Building on the outcomes of this project, a training guide for teacher trainers and multipliers responsible for quality assurance in language teaching at various levels in the educational system has been produced. The guide aims to provide them with a complementary tool for this work.

Aims

To develop a training guide for quality assurance on the basis of the existing CD-Rom on Quality Management
To train multipliers/trainers to set off a cascading process
To work towards consolidating a quality assurance culture in language education across Europe and beyond

Procedure

Expert meetings and cross-project links with other ECML projects
A survey to collect feedback on the applicability of the CD-Rom on Quality Management
Producing the "QualiTraining" Guide
Regional events for trainer training and a central event for dissemination and piloting
Updating the project web site

Main outcomes of the project

The "QualiTraining Guide" for trainers and multipliers
Multiplier training events
A network of trainers in the field of quality management in language education

Cooperation
EAQUALS – The European Association for Quality Language Services
With the support of QUEST Romania, OPTIMA Bulgaria, The International Learning and Research Centre, UK

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Summary of Unit 1

The first part of the unit examines some of the different principles that can be applied to quality in general and explores how they can be applied in language teaching. The four "models" examined are:

- quality as client satisfaction – to be achieved by analysing "clients" needs and wishes, and planning and implementing teaching/learning activities which meet these needs. The notion of client in education is a complex one as it includes "direct" clients (the learners in the classroom) and other stakeholders (parents, employers, universities, etc.);

- quality as a process – delivering language courses can be seen as a set of processes: a connected chain from needs analysis, general setting of curriculum aims, defining syllabus, planning lessons, etc. There are similar sets of processes in evaluation procedures and in developing resources. Quality involves getting every step of the process "right";

- quality based on results – the quality of language teaching must also judge the efficiency of the process: how much language is learned? Is there satisfactory added value in the learning process? The difficulty of a pure results-based assessment of quality is examined;

- quality based on values – education is not a commercial enterprise and it is important to define underlying values – such as the promotion of mutual respect and tolerance – in order to assess its quality.

The guide prompts readers to explore these principles, all of which need to be included in an overall approach to quality, and to reflect on how they can be applied in their own contexts.

To illustrate how changes in the professional environment impact on the way the principles are applied, there is a description of how the development of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), and its implementation, has affected language education.

The second part of the unit presents some of the basic concepts related to quality assurance: how do we establish criteria and use these to set standards? What indicators can we use to find out if we are achieving quality? How can benchmarking help us in this work? Again the concepts are applied to the readers' own environment.

1.0 Before starting your training in quality management

Reflective task 1

This reflective task is intended to help you to relate the theme of the workshop to your professional environment.

Putting quality management into practice does not take place in a vacuum. It is affected by a variety of factors – ministry of education edicts, the availability of time and money, public pressure, the attitudes of parents, colleagues and students. Some of these are favourable to applying quality, some work against it. A starting point for our exploration of "qualitraining" will be to share awareness of some of these factors.

A. Positive factors for quality initiatives

Public attitudes (especially to language learning)	Ministry policy	Teacher training	Availability of resources	Other factors

Unit 1: Quality principles and basic concepts

B. Negative factors for quality initiatives

Public attitudes (especially to language learning)	Ministry policy	Teacher training	Availability of resources/expertise	Other factors

Try to be as specific as possible in describing the factors which affect quality in your environment.
Would you say that your professional environment is generally favourable to the development of quality in language education? Or the opposite?

Reflective task 2

The QualiTraining guide aims to help people who work in language education to set up systems for improving quality. In order to put into practice the ideas we present, you will need to take quite a lot of decisions – this will not be new to you, as everyone in teaching takes decisions every day – planning what to do in lessons, dealing with learners' problems, deciding on how fast or how slowly to cover a particular part of the programme. All these can be described as "managing" quality. Managerial decisions – including those related to quality management – need to be taken at all levels in an institution.

(a) Have a look at the table[1] below and reflect on the management (or management-related) responsibilities you have in your present job. At which of the three levels are you generally involved in decision taking?

Level	Decisions				
	By whom?	**About what?**	**Broad or narrow?**	**Timescale?**	**Frequency?**
1. Strategic planning	Curriculum developers, school directors, ministry of education officials	Goals and strategies for attaining them. Policy decisions – defining aims for language education, producing curricula, allocating resources	Broad. The general nature of activities to be undertaken	Policy for next decade. Plans for between one and five years	Occasional
2. Management control	Heads of departments, teacher trainers, teachers	Translating strategy into organisational practice – deciding on a training programme, producing a syllabus on the basis of the curriculum	Medium. Could be involved in either	Next week, next month or the next year or two	Weekly, monthly, yearly
3. Operational control	Heads of departments, teacher trainers, teachers	Using checklists, following procedures to ensure teaching and other activities are carried out effectively and efficiently	Largely concerned with day-to-day activities	From "the here and now" to next week/ month	Mainly day-to-day

(b) What are your expectations from QualiTraining in relation to your current or future responsibilities and role in your institution/ department? Make a brief note of these and discuss them with a partner.

Unit 1: Quality principles and basic concepts

Unit 1

This unit provides an opportunity to consider the principles behind quality management and some of its basic concepts.

In order to discuss quality it is first important to be able to define and describe quality.

1.1 Self-assessment and reflection

What does quality mean to you personally? Think of daily transactions, events, purchases, meetings, etc. What makes you think "that was good", or the opposite?

What does quality mean in your profession – as a teacher, a trainer, a manager?
What rationale enables you to say:

■ that was a good lesson;

■ it is an effective school;

■ what an enriching learning experience.

Try and express for yourself your commitment to quality in your job. "For me quality means …".

Please note that illustrations are merely suggestive of where the text would benefit from illustrative input.

If you are using the guide in a training environment use the self-assessment exercise – first individually, then in pairs, then in groups of four, then the whole group.

The aim is to get consensus on a formulation of the "commitment to quality".

1.2 Some principles of quality management

In order to set up a system of quality management, you need to be familiar with different theoretical models of what quality is and how it can be achieved. Among the models frequently applied to quality are:

A client satisfaction principle – quality is achieved when customer needs are met, when client expectations are exceeded. To do this you need to:

■ identify your client. This is quite complex – the person who "consumes" the service is often different from the one who is paying for it, so you have direct and indirect clients. Some people who work in an institution do not have direct contact with external customers but provide services for their colleagues – who are internal clients.

Who are the clients in the education systems you work in: children, parents, future employers, higher education, the state?

Think about who are the clients in your working situation. Are they direct, indirect, internal, external?

Think about yourself as a client. Who provides services for you? What needs and wishes should they satisfy to provide a high quality service?

A process model of quality – quality involves analysing all the processes involved in delivering a service – for example, a language course – and making sure they are produced efficiently.

Processes can be divided into three phases – planning, implementation and outcome. In industry the objective is to achieve zero tolerance of error and a slogan for process management is "get it right, the first time, every time".

Quality based on results – one way of defining quality is based on results – in tests and examinations, for example. The principle is that unless you can prove the effectiveness of educational activity by measurable results, you cannot claim quality.

Education systems have both stated values and implicit values in national curricula; institutions can have stated values in documents such as mission statements, but also unstated values which govern how people think and act, and how they judge whether quality is being achieved.

What are the processes involved in producing a sequence of language lessons? Fill in some of the other components of the process of course delivery.

Planning	Implementation	Outcomes
Setting learning objectives	Presenting and explaining language	Testing progress
Choosing materials	Managing activities	Assessing achievement

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using examination and test results as indicators of quality?

Can you think of other bases for measuring results of learning/teaching activities?

Quality based on personal development – in this model quality is based on the motivation, the attitudes and skills of the people involved. In order for it to help maintain and improve quality, the institution needs to establish an environment which enables staff to develop and co-operate. This can be through staff development programmes, action research, peer observation, encouragement of innovation, quality circles. It implies an open style of leadership, with room for individual responsibility and initiative.

Value-driven quality. Education is not just a mechanical industrial process, but embodies and tries to communicate values. The work of the Council of Europe in language learning seeks to promote plurilingualism as an instrument of tolerance and respect for other ways of life and other values. The present programme of the ECML is Languages for social cohesion.

Describe – from your own professional experience – good practice in creating a working environment which promotes quality.

What are the explicit values which affect quality in your working environment? What are the unstated ones?

What specific values might (or should) be specific to language teaching and learning?

Unit 1: Quality principles and basic concepts

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR)[2] and its influence on quality in language education

The CEFR is a major development in language teaching and learning. It has contributed to the setting of common standards for establishing goals and measuring achievement; it states values to be considered in deciding on curricula and approach; and it offers a conceptual framework for teaching, learning and assessment. Its impact can be seen in the way in which it influences our application of the quality principles we have described.

Quality based on client satisfaction – the CEFR provides a much more detailed basis for defining clients' needs. The self-assessment grid (CEFR, Table 2, p. 26) and the prominence given to self-assessment as an instrument for successful learning provide a basis for clients to express what they can already do and what their objectives are. The introduction (CEFR, p. 4) defines many of the features of needs analyses:

"Language learning activities are based on the needs, motivations, characteristics of learners:

- What will they need to do with the language?
- What will they need to learn in order to do what they want?
- What makes them want to learn?
- What sort of people are they?
- What knowledge, skill and experiences do their teachers possess?
- What access do they have to resources?
- How much time can they afford to spend?"

The table analysing the external context of language use (CEFR, Table 5, p. 48) describes personal, public, occupational and educational domains and the situations in which learners will use the language. Above all, the simple positive language of the scales and "can do" statements makes talking about needs and wishes accessible to the ordinary learner.

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2   Council of Europe (2001).

Quality as a process – process-oriented teaching and learning require detailed description and analysis; the CEFR's coherent system of level descriptors enables schools and curriculum designers to make learning programmes which have a logical progression and where each step builds on the previous one. The scales describe the competences needed to learn languages and the activities language users carry out. The underlying process of language learning is described:

> "ability to put competences into action in the production/reception of spoken utterances/ written texts to express and understand meanings, to interpret and negotiate meaning in context and to engage in communicative activities."

The CEFR provides the conceptual categories on which processes can be defined and set up.

Results-based quality assurance is made much easier by the existence of the levels and the scales. Clear and detailed objectives can be set and approaches to assessing proficiency reliably have been established. They make it possible to compare achievement in different languages in different contexts with a shared vocabulary and in meaningful language which everyone can understand. There is a growing body of evidence that awareness of objectives and self-assessment contributes to improved learning success and progress.

Quality and values – the CEFR suggests values relevant to language learning, for example:

> "To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication" (CEFR, p. 3).

> "To promote methods of modern language teaching which will strengthen independence of thought, judgment and action, combined with social skills and responsibility" (CEFR p. 4).

It suggests that aims of this kind are relevant to exercising democratic citizenship and to promoting social cohesion.

Conclusion – the different models are not mutually exclusive, and in most environments are all present in some way. Achieving quality will never be static, but will be influenced by changes in the environment. The CEFR is one example of the way in which changes in the context of work can influence the way we implement quality processes. Thus, quality management will involve adopting a model which combines application of the different principles. Below is one example of such a model[3]:

This model includes all the four principles we spoke of – the customers, process management, results and the development of values (through the "Society results").
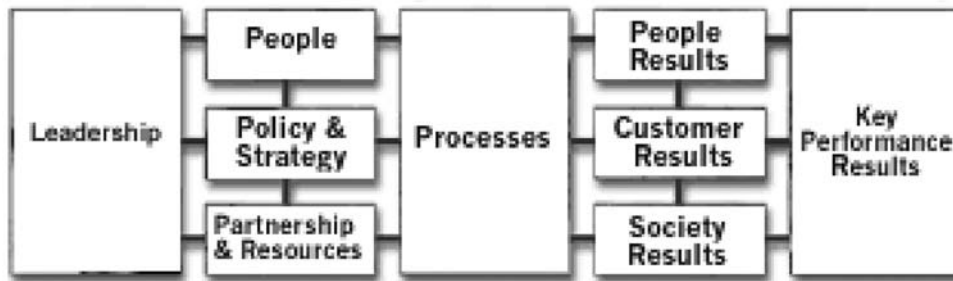
1.3 Basic concepts – criteria, indicators, standards, benchmarks

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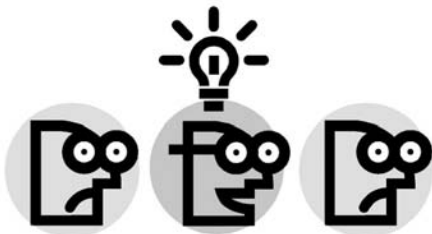
3   EFQM (2002).

Putting the principles into practice involves:

■ deciding on the criteria to be applied to quality in the context of your activity. Any quality initiative begins with asking oneself questions like:

    ■ Are we teaching effectively?

    ■ Does the curriculum provide the right framework?

    ■ Are we using our resources efficiently?

    ■ Do we enable each individual student to achieve his/her full potential?

■ when we ask these questions we are assuming criteria for good language teaching which might include features such as:

    ■ effective teaching methods providing opportunities for learners to communicate in the foreign language;

    ■ a transparent curriculum framework with clear learning objectives;

    ■ efficient use of resources to contribute to optimal learning;

    ■ individualised support for all learners;

■ in order to answer the questions we need to collect data – on examination results, on the components of the curriculum, on our resources and how we use them, on the amount of individual help learners receive;

■ if we want to make the data useful, we need to choose indicators, data which can be measured, which will allow us to compare our performance with others and enable us to take decisions on action we can take to improve what we do. For example, a common indicator for learning progress could be examination results, or standardised test results.

Examination results
65% of students pass public examination x at the end of the school year
35% of students fail

This information is not very useful to us unless we can compare it with other performances in the same context; if the average pass rate is 80%, then we are doing badly, if it is 40% we are doing well (at least in comparison with others).

On the basis of the evidence provided by the data we have collected, we can set standards – a definition of the operational objectives we set in order to meet the criteria and the ways in which we will assess our performance.

One way of setting standards is to use benchmarking, identifying what is considered a best possible performance and setting this as a goal by which we measure if we are doing well or not. Benchmarking can be internal – for example, identifying the best practice within a school or institution and taking steps to ensure that everyone adopts this – or external – identifying another institution which represents best practice and adopting their standards of best practice as a model and as the touchstone by which we will measure our own achievements.

The CD-Rom has examples of indicators and standards used in language education in different contexts and countries.

Apply the concepts of criteria, standards, indicators and benchmarking to your own professional context.

Classroom teaching
Criteria – for example, active, learner-centred, communicative   ☐   ☐
Indicators – for example, amount of learner talk compared to teacher talk   ☐   ☐
Standards – for example, regular class observations verifying varied use of different classroom formats – group and pair work, etc.   ☐   ☐
Benchmarking – for example, identification of good practice through class observation. Setting this as the goal for common standards.   ☐   ☐

Do the same for other aspects of quality management of language teaching and learning. For example:

- ☐ student achievement;
- ☐ services to students;
- ☐ staff training;
- ☐ curriculum and syllabus planning;
- ☐ safety in the school;
- ☐ assessment and testing.

Unit 2: Quality and people – *Mary Rose*

2.1 Developing a quality culture

2.2 Leadership for quality

2.3 Self-learning

Summary of Unit 2

The unit explores the role of people in a quality culture and identifies some of the components of a quality culture. The significance of how an institution makes a public commitment to quality is emphasised. Readers are asked to consider the effect of different influences on their own institution's culture.

In an organisation with a quality culture, leadership is a function rather than a role. In this section of the unit, the use of distributed leadership is highlighted. Distributed leadership happens when leaders structure opportunities for leadership to be shared and when opportunities are provided for all staff to develop their leadership skills.

The impact of leadership on quality is examined and the importance of the concept of capacity building is explored. Capacity building operates at individual and organisational level. The individuals within an organisation will be fully engaged with the mission through their emotional and intellectual commitment. This leads to holistic growth, development and transformation at organisational level.

The guide encourages readers to consider the aspects of leadership, the leadership processes which promote quality and how they can be applied in their own contexts.

The final part of the unit examines an organisation's self-learning – the connection between action research and innovation and the role of change in a quality culture.

Readers are asked to reflect on how their own institution responds to new thinking and offers a tool to help readers answer "How do we know we have a culture of quality?"

Unit 2

2.1 Developing a quality culture

Making a commitment to quality starts with a vision, a shared commitment, a public statement. It provides the focus and energy for the organisation. It expresses the organisation's values. This public statement can take many forms – national curricula, mission statements, charters.

A culture of quality is created where quality in the context of the organisation is understood fully. For example, a school will be focused on student outcomes and will be committed to the equal worth and success of every learner. It will identify processes which produce quality outcomes, develop systems which establish how quality will be judged and set quality standards which are able to be verified.

Both public and private sector institutions have sought to communicate their standards through public statements of their educational principles and of the promises they make to their clients.

What they all have in common is the recognition that it is impossible to have systems and procedures for quality unless everyone knows what they are and that they are understood and acted on.

■ A commitment to quality implies an institutional culture committed to continuous improvement.

What influences the culture of your organisation? For example, examination results, funding streams, external expectations, expertise of staff?

Are there differences and similarities between the quality cultures and commitment of public and private sector institutions?

Without this explicit commitment it also becomes impossible to observe quality or to assess it.

 The CD-Rom contains many examples of mission statements, charters, guarantees, etc. Look at a selection of these and examine how they:

  ▪ set aims and objectives for the institution;

  ▪ make the values of the institution explicit;

  ▪ describe quality;

  ▪ identify clients, both internal and external;

  ▪ make commitments and promises which involve all those working in the institution;

  ▪ indicate the expectations that clients may have.

▪ A quality culture is a learning culture in which all members of the institution are involved; a self-critical, improving culture in which all staff are fully engaged. A culture which allows each individual to understand his/her contribution to achieving the shared vision and to answering the question "What difference am I trying to make personally?"

After viewing the CD-Rom, it is helpful to consider what indicated to you that the institutions in the examples had made a commitment to quality.

Activity

Think about how your institution expresses its commitment to quality.

Is it clear?
Is everyone aware of it?
How is this shared?

When you visit or work with another institution, what indicates to you that the institution has made a commitment to quality?

Discuss this in pairs or in small groups.

2.2 Leadership for quality

Leaders, in all areas of an organisation, are central to developing and sustaining quality; in how clear vision and sense of purpose is demonstrated and in how a commitment to shared vision and common purpose is built. This applies to all leaders, not only to the directors or principals of institutions. Everyone in the organisation who has a leadership role, in whatever form, is instrumental in shaping the culture of the organisation. The quality of this leadership will be evident in its effectiveness in motivating and influencing staff and building teams.

In a quality culture many members of the organisation will have opportunities to lead. The sharing of leadership functions may be described as distributed leadership. Where this happens staff are enabled to develop their personal leadership skills.

It is the role of leaders in an organisation to ensure that all available resources are developed and used fully; this applies to human resources. Leaders will want to ensure that the whole-hearted engagement and commitment of all staff to the organisation's mission is secured. This is frequently referred to as building the capacity of the organisation.

Activity

Identify a leader that you admire – what are the key characteristics that this leader demonstrates?

In pairs/threes discuss the characteristics you have identified.

Activity

Think about how people in your organisation demonstrate commitment to its mission. Identify and describe the visible signs of this commitment.

Discuss this in pairs.

Some indicators of an institution where the leadership understands this concept of capacity building will be:

■ a positive climate;

■ transparent management;

■ people-centred, where people are positioned at the centre of the organisation.

Full engagement with the organisation's mission will depend on both the emotional and intellectual commitment of the staff.

Emotional capacity grows through shared vision, strong commitment to the institution's values, ambitions and goals.

The extent to which the emotional capacity of the workforce has been built in an organisation will be reflected in the institution-wide expectations and responsibilities.

Intellectual capacity is founded in emotional commitment and is grown through consistent, stimulating professional development, learning dialogues and experiences which enable a deep understanding of the organisation's mission to develop.

In an organisation, individuals will have values and beliefs. It is essential that leaders understand how individuals interact in order to help them share values and beliefs, to clarify what is valued and to build a shared vision. Where distributed leadership is practised, greater synergy within and between teams is developed. It is important that leaders recognise and nurture the interdependence within the institution in order to build capacity effectively. This nurturing of interdependence is intrinsically linked to the development of a quality culture.

Activity

Think about the ways in which leaders in your organisation build the organisation's capacity. For example, does the structure of the institution support the functioning of teams? Is team review a feature of working processes?

Discuss this in pairs or in small groups.

In a quality culture, different dimensions of leadership will be evident. Effective leadership is multidimensional.

Some examples of dimensions of leadership:

■ moral leadership. This is grounded in personal and professional values;

■ strategic leadership. This is clearly focused on policy, organisation and implementation to achieve goals;

■ managerial leadership. This focuses on function and tasks;

■ collaborative leadership. This is based on democratic principles and encourages the participation of all stakeholders;

■ interpersonal leadership. This centres on collaboration and interpersonal relationships;

■ distributed leadership. This engages a range of people in leadership activity, it extends the boundaries of leadership beyond delegation. Leadership is a function rather than a role.

Effective leadership recognises the diverse needs of the institution and adapts leadership styles to suit the context. Effective leaders will draw from a personal repertoire based on "fitness for purpose".

Whatever the approach to leadership style, it is the leadership processes which underpin this that promote quality.

Activity for a small group

Case study: a language school
Read the scenario summary. Consider what steps a new leader could take to help move this organisation to one with a high capacity for quality.

Scenario: a language school
In this scenario the language school currently has a low capacity for quality. There are a number of challenges:

■ managers encourage staff to overcome these but the existing structures do not enable staff to work together;

■ a number of managerial tasks are devolved to staff but they are not given the autonomy to deal with new tasks;

■ the focus on teaching and learning is not strong;

■ staff are expected to use innovative teaching methods but have limited time and very few opportunities to test and develop new ideas;

■ staff work mainly in informal groups on an ad hoc basis. They find it difficult to understand how their work fits with other developments;

■ there is high staff turnover.

The following cluster of skills will be evident in a quality culture:

■ active listening, empathising;

■ giving feedback, giving praise;

■ managing conflict, negotiating;

■ networking.

In a quality culture, effective leaders enable institutions to become successful, professional learning institutions, setting directions, developing people, developing the organisation and responding productively to opportunities and challenges.

Effective leaders ensure the institution's outcomes remain focused on its mission, for example, a language school will be focused on students' language achievements.

Consider your own institution. In your view what are the essential leadership characteristics and leadership processes needed for your organisation's success?

The CD-Rom has a number of institutional case studies. Consider the dimensions of leadership that are evident in the examples you choose to read.

2.3 Self-learning

Importantly, in a culture of quality, institutional self-learning is constant; institutions that enquire into their practice generate their own knowledge.

The tools and instruments for self-assessment at institutional and individual level are essential features of an organisation's self-learning. Using action research strategies places enquiry about practice at the heart of an organisation. Action research enables practitioners to reflect on and analyse practice in the specific context of the institution. Through action research, which may be a collaborative or an individual activity, the teacher or teachers are able to:

■ investigate key issues in teaching and learning;

■ turn data and experience into new knowledge;

■ use evidence to inform decisions;

■ use enquiry for staff development.

The outcomes help teachers to find practical solutions to real learning challenges, stimulating new ideas and innovative practice.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) offers a helpful framework for looking at the quality of applied and practice-based research. The four dimensions of quality are identified as epistemic: methodological and theoretical robustness, technological, capacity development and value for people, and economic. An extract from the framework shows the quality sub-dimensions which may be used to develop criteria for assessing the quality of research. The extract shows the sub-dimension to use when practitioners are engaged in action research.

 Reflect on your institution's strategies for enquiring into its practice. How is this done?

Extract from the ESRC Framework for Assessing Quality[4]

Dimensions of quality			
Epistemic: methodological and theoretical robustness	Technological	Capacity development and value for people	Economic
		Plausibility Partnership collaboration and engagement Reflexivity, deliberation and criticism Receptiveness Transformation and personal growth	

Activity

Think about how you would assess the quality of action research and enquiry-based learning in your institution. The sub-dimensions in the extract from the ESRC framework may be helpful in this consideration. Discuss this in pairs or small groups.

4   Furlong and Oancea (2005: 15). The report was developed as a result of a study carried out for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The CD-Rom contains a number of examples of how institutions in the state sector are developing self-reflection and structured analysis of practice. Look at a selection of these and identify how they:

- gather evidence of practice;
- promote staff involvement in enquiry;
- evaluate effectiveness;
- through enquiry activities, generate knowledge about how to develop what is worthwhile.

In a quality culture, evidence is robust, "first-hand" and used confidently to analyse practice.

Activity

After looking at the examples given on the CD-Rom consider the attitudes evident in your institution. Is there a commitment to engage in a continuous process of reflection and analysis? Does this process result in action?

Discuss this in pairs.

Managing the future

An organisation with an embedded culture of quality is adaptable and forward looking.

An institution committed to continuous improvement, with established quality processes and systems, is a learning organisation. It will understand the change process and know that continued professional development and training are crucial to embedding change and sustaining quality.

An organisation with the confidence and capacity for innovation will encourage risk taking, secure in the knowledge that this enables radical change. New ideas are tested and developed into leading-edge practice.

The change process is used creatively to move the institution forward; change and innovation are embraced when they enable the paradigm shift to a quality culture with a focus on future needs.

Historically, it was the function of institutions to teach knowledge. Today, we accept that institutions need to teach students how to learn and an institution with a culture of quality will recognise clients' needs.

Activity

Consider how your organisation manages change.

Choose one of the two activities that follow to help you discuss and explore this in a small group.

1. Think about the future of your institution's work. What further pedagogical and organisational changes do you believe necessary?

2. What changes has your institution made in the last three years to provide for:
   - ■ new ways of viewing knowledge;
   - ■ new understanding about the nature of learning;
   - ■ changing career pathways;
   - ■ new patterns of global interaction between organisations;
   - ■ new information technologies?

Summary reflection

Reflect on the following key questions:

What are my institution's most significant skills and capabilities?

What do our clients really want?

What problems and challenges do we need to overcome?

Are my perceptions of the institution's culture shared by my colleagues?

Looking back over the last three years what would I change?

Would I recommend the institution to a friend:
- to work there?
- to study there?

These questions bring together some of the key ideas explored in the unit. They may be used individually or in a group to support an objective understanding of the institution's current culture.

Assessment and validation

How do we know we have a culture of quality?

A continuum[5] is a useful tool for providing a picture of the current position. For the following assessment activity a simple continuum of 1 to 5 is suggested.

Consider the examples given in the descriptors, where would you place your institution on the following continuum?

What reasons would you give for the positioning of your institution in each instance?

Institutional values are not shared and are rarely discussed	1 2 3 4 5	Institutional values are shared, they are real and acted on constantly
Leaders are mainly concerned with procedures and systems	1 2 3 4 5	Leaders are involved with people
Communication in the institution is always "top down"	1 2 3 4 5	There is open, effective dialogue and communication with all in the institution
Working groups have limited sense of purpose	1 2 3 4 5	Confident, self-managing teams are evident
Lack of success is considered a failure	1 2 3 4 5	Mistakes are learned from and different strategies tried
Risk taking is discouraged	1 2 3 4 5	Risk taking is viewed as part of the learning process

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5   Risk taking is viewed as part of the learning process.

Unit 3: Systems, processes and instruments for quality management – *Laura Muresan*

3.1 Setting up systems for monitoring the quality of educational processes

3.2 Institutional self-evaluation

3.3 Class observation as an integral part of quality assurance and professional development

Summary of Unit 3

The main themes of this unit are the setting up of internal systems for quality management, the steps and processes involved, and the instruments that can be used for quality assurance and enhancement in language education institutions/departments.

Questions addressed in this unit include: How to identify symptoms of low quality? How to diagnose the causes and plan appropriate remedial action? Possible ways of collecting, selecting and using data are exemplified – such as action research, classroom observation, interviews, focus group discussions, etc.

The second part of Unit 3 explores institutional self-evaluation with its various dimensions. Principles, functions and aims are discussed in relation to the context and main focus of the self-evaluation process. The guide encourages readers to explore the link between individual and team self-ev□y enhancement.

The main focus in the last part of this unit is on class observation, which is presented as a key component both of quality management and of professional development. Its multiple functions are discussed in relation to the different types of observation and the contexts of use. From a quality management perspective, effective observation serves the purpose of identifying both areas for improvement and areas of strength. Setting up systems for the sharing of good practice, facilitating a culture of constructive feedback and continuous professional development benefit both the institution and all the individual professionals involved in the process of quality assurance.

The importance of a collaborative atmosphere and appropriate attitudes and skills is highlighted both in relation to class observation and institutional self-evaluation.

The methodological approach throughout the unit is that of encouraging readers to reflect on their own experience of systems and processes, and to take a problem-solving approach to the activities and case studies presented.

Unit 3

3.1 Setting up systems for monitoring the quality of educational processes

To make sure that the entire institution/department operates at high quality standards, it is vital that there are effective quality management systems in place and that all those involved in the educational process – management, teachers, learners, the administrative team and other "actors" – are aware both of the institutional goals and of the systems existing in the institution.

The effectiveness of quality management systems depends on the meaningful implementation of methods and instruments for monitoring the quality of all processes. Dynamic, forward-looking institutions are constantly preoccupied to improve their services, to introduce innovation and to ensure consistent integration of institutional development with individual self-learning.

This involves setting up workable systems – developing or selecting procedures and instruments to be applied, as well as deciding on the various steps. Usually these include:

■ gathering evidence and data relevant in relation to the goals set;

■ analysing and interpreting the data so as to take informed decisions;

■ taking effective action for improvement or remedial work;

■ ongoing monitoring of processes and checking on the effect of action taken.

As a follow-up to such a complex exercise, institutional goals are reviewed, and systems and processes revised.

The steps of a quality cycle are presented synthetically in the following diagram.

Stages and processes in a quality cycle

Institutional goals

Setting up systems for quality monitoring – for example through institutional self-evaluation

Reviewing goals

Revising systems and processes

Ongoing monitoring of processes – for example, through action research

Gathering relevant data – exemplified through class observation

Taking effective action – integrating quality monitoring with self-development

Analysing the data for informed decision taking

Depending on the overall goal and the specific aims, the time frame and the scale of the operation, the institution – ideally in a team venture – will plan the steps within each stage and will decide on methodology.

Gathering relevant evidence and data

The most frequently used methods are:

■ observation – of classes, of processes, etc. – as one of the most powerful tools of gathering data in a language education environment, as detailed in the third section of Unit 3;

■ interviews, focus group meetings;

■ surveys based on questionnaires;

■ the study of documents, work scrutiny, the study of diaries, learner and/or teacher portfolios, etc.

Selecting the methods, techniques and instruments for data collection depends on what kind of information is needed, from whom, and in which concrete context (time, resources, etc.).

"Simple rules of thumb for selecting methods include:

■ To find out what people do in public, use direct observation.

■ To find out what they do in private, use interviews, questionnaires or diary techniques.

■ To find out what they think, feel, believe, use interviews, questionnaires or attitude scales.

■ To determine their abilities or measure their intelligence or personality, use standardised tests."[6]

Quantitative data can be obtained through questionnaires (for examples see the questionnaires on the CD-Rom, for instance: www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/Greece_intro.htm[7]), structured interviews, "certificate numbering", etc.

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6   Robson (1993: 188-189).

7   In all cases the full link to the website is indicated – the accompanying CD-Rom is a static version of the site (downloaded on 01 September 2007).

Unit 3: Systems, processes and instruments for quality management

Qualitative data is usually collected through observation, focus group meetings, peer review, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, etc. See the questionnaires and interviews on the CD-Rom, for instance:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/MF_France_intro_E.htm;

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/Interviews/Interviews_E.htm;

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/LM_Interview_LW.htm.

Since all methods have their strengths and shortcomings, to ensure complementarity and objectivity, it is advisable to use a mixture of methods, techniques and instruments, as well as to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

Analysing and interpreting the data

Depending on the nature of the data and the contextual factors, the approach taken can be:

■ comparative – for example, when preparing for an external inspection, data on the school's performance will be compared with the national standard or with the quality standards set out in the inspection documents of the national or international accreditation body (for details on benchmarking, see Unit 4 in this guide and the examples on the CD-Rom, for instance: www.ecml. at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/assoc_national.htm);

■ longitudinal – analysing the school's performance over a longer span of time, for example when implementing change or after having identified problems (such as drops in satisfaction rates, exam results below national norms, issues raised in buzz observations and focus groups).

Whatever the choice of instruments, and however simple or complex as an operation, a thumb rule remains the ethical approach to confidentiality and the use of data obtained. This involves addressing questions such as: Who is going to have access to the information? How is it going to be used? Is this transparent and clear from the very beginning to all those involved in the evaluation?

Taking effective action to correct problems and piloting possible solutions

Before committing to a hypothetical solution, it is advisable to try out possible ways of action and to carry out school-based research in order to see which alternative works best in a given context.

Action research is "a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social educational practices".[8] It has tended to involve a wide range of approaches for gathering data about both individual teachers' work and institutional processes. Its added value consists in its relevance both to teacher development and institutional quality assurance. To strengthen this dual role, it is important to enhance its systematic character, "to ensure that the personal reflection is carried out in a valid way"[9].

While acknowledging the value of the individual teacher's concerns and value judgments, it is vital to keep it open for peer support and collaborative action, and to use it coherently for diagnosing problematic areas, communicating the outcomes of research, and collaboratively working towards finding appropriate solutions.

Even if "eclectic", it needs to be "premised on a number of principles:

■ that its aim is educational improvement;

■ that it incorporates the self-development of the main researcher and the other people that become involved;

■ that it is rigorous and self-critical of assumptions;

■ and that its outcomes are made public."[10]

For examples of successful action research carried out by teachers in their own context – see the case studies at the end of this guide and further examples on the CD-Rom.

What experience with action research have you got in your institution?

In what contexts/situations have you used it?

Has it contributed to improving educational processes?

What instruments and techniques are you using in your institutional context?

For what purpose?

With what results?

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8   Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 5).
9   Craft (1996: 23).
10   Lomax (1996: 85).

Unit 3: Systems, processes and instruments for quality management

The sections on institutional self-evaluation and class observation below also include examples of top-down and bottom-up approaches, with a focus on shared responsibility and co-operative processes, for increased staff motivation.

Checking on the effect of action taken

To check on the effects of action taken, most of the above methods and instruments can be applied. Data collection, therefore, needs to be seen as a continuous process, so that before and after comparisons are possible. Once pilot projects are considered successful, action can be taken for large/larger scale implementation of improvements or change.

For an illustration of how this process works in reality, see the case study "An ICT quality system to support learning" by David Turrell.

In reality, most of the above processes, methods and instruments are interconnected and can be used for multiple purposes, depending on the stage in which they are introduced and on the institution's goals at a given moment in its development.

In what stages of the quality monitoring process would you use the following methods and instruments? Please fill in the table below. With your peer, select one area and discuss in more detail the purposes pursued through the use of specific methods/instruments and the results obtained:

■ surveys based on questionnaires with all staff members;

■ surveys based on questionnaires and/or interviews with learners and parents;

■ focus group meetings with staff, with students, etc.

■ interviews – informal or focused, semi-structured or structured;

■ peer review;

■ whole team meetings;

■ working group meetings;

■ observation of activities, of processes and persons;

■ audio or video recording of processes;

■ evaluation sheets addressed to customers or other stakeholders, etc.

■ portfolios for learners (adapted to age group);

■ portfolios for teachers;

■ checklists and questionnaires for teacher self-assessment;

■ student work audits;

■ diaries, logbooks, etc.

Stages	Examples of methods and instruments	For what purpose?	With what results?
Setting up systems and planning activities			
Gathering relevant data			
Analysing and interpreting the data			
Taking action to correct problems and piloting possible solutions			
Checking on the effects of action taken			
Reviewing goals and revising systems			

3.2 Institutional self-evaluation

An important dimension of quality monitoring is objective self-evaluation. This involves distribution of leadership roles in a team venture, setting the framework for a collegiate exercise, setting up workable systems, developing and selecting procedures and instruments to be applied, as well as deciding on the various steps.

Institutional self-evaluation is defined as participatory evaluation initiated in the institution (school, language centre, programme) by the school/centre personnel or project team to facilitate periodic or continuous improvement of the teaching operation/language services/the overall activity (adapted from Mackay et al., 1998).

The functions and aims of self-evaluation may differ, depending on the context and the evaluation focus. Thus, self-evaluation may play multiple roles and can serve one or several of the following purposes:

■ **analysing the unfolding of a project or a programme:** in a project or programme framework, project teams analyse the unfolding of the project or the programme, "measuring" progress and outcomes against the initial objectives and the action plan decided on. Among other aims, this may also serve the purpose of justifying the manner in which the resources assigned to the project had been used, of demonstrating the success of the project and applying for a continuation of the funding. When this approach was introduced as an alternative to evaluation by external experts, it was perceived as a novelty. In the course of time, it has become standard practice to expect project teams to self-evaluate progress against initial objectives. For the 3rd medium-term programme of the ECML, for instance, it is already in the project proposal phase that candidates are asked to indicate what self-evaluation tools they intend to use for the ongoing monitoring of progress (see the project proposal template on the ECML website – www.ecml.at);

■ **diagnosing existing problems and documenting the need for change and innovation:** to increase the chances of successful change, it is important for the organisation (management and teaching team) to determine the readiness for change, to identify possible obstacles, to analyse the costs and benefits of intervention, to find a realistic point of entry for initiating change. In

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss the following:
■ In your institution/ department, is there a system for self-evaluation? If "yes", who moderates it?
■ Who is involved? At individual level? At institutional level?
■ How? What mechanisms are applied?
■ Is there any action taken in response to the outcomes of self-evaluation?

an educational environment – especially in a language teaching/learning context – all this would involve "steps like a self-assessment process, a focused period of class observation, staff meetings, etc."[11];

■ serving as an instrument of quality management: in an institution or department, systematic self-evaluation allows teams to analyse all the aspects of institutional activity, to identify problems and suggest an action plan for certain priority areas that may need improvement or change – see the case studies at the end of this guide;

■ serving as an instrument and exercise for internal quality assurance – as quality control by "insiders" – for instance, when preparing for an external inspection (quality control by "outsiders"), such as when applying for membership of a national or international quality organisation (Maxwell-Hyslop, 1999) or when applying for awards such as the "investors in people" award in Great Britain (www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/Pages/Home.aspx).

For examples of self-evaluation as internal quality assurance, see "Quality management in language education" on the CD-Rom:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/self_assessment.htm;

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/internal.htm.

■ a formative role in the "learning company" approach, enhancing development opportunities for all, both at an institutional level, and at a personal level for each of the participants in the process.

International experience and practice have proved that this type of evaluation allows for a well-documented analysis, and in addition to this, it relies on motivation that is intrinsic to the programme or the school. In Case study 4a in this guide – "A quality vision for whole school learning" – David Turrell convincingly illustrates how:

> "a systematic and comprehensive approach to Quality Assurance … embodies whole school self-evaluation, multi-level development planning and a belief in change and improvement using pedagogical innovation. It sees professional learning and school based enquiry and research as the bedrock to improving the quality of education for its students."
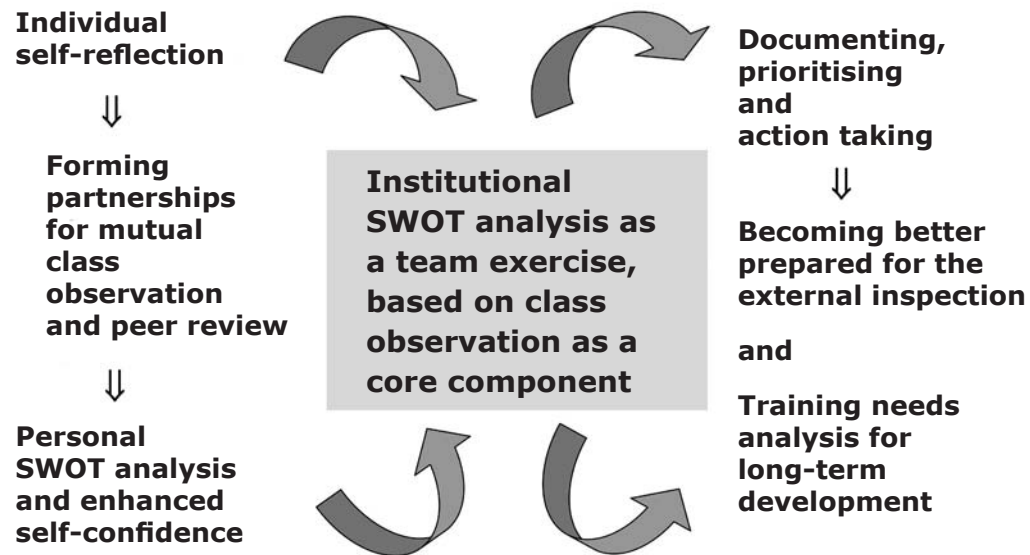
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11   Heyworth (2003a: 30).

When planning self-evaluation exercises – be they for a selected group of staff or for the entire institution – it is important to clarify and communicate from the outset issues such as: What data would be gathered and for what specific purpose? What would be the management and communication lines within the institutional "hierarchy"? Who will moderate the process? For example, the top level? Will it involve everybody? Who designs the criteria? Who receives and interprets the data?

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the data, it is equally important to address also issues of transparency, honesty, ownership of the data, confidentiality – for example, How will the data be used? What will be the management's attitude to risk taking? What are the consequences for the individual participants in the self-evaluation exercise?

In accordance with the developmental model of quality (as shown in Unit 1 – "Quality based on personal development") and the "self-learning" dimension of a quality culture (Unit 2), self-evaluation can be seen as playing an important formative role, by ensuring the inter-relatedness between quality assurance, institutional development, team learning and personal professional growth, as suggested in the diagram below.

Linking quality assurance with professional development

Individual self-reflection

⇓

Forming partnerships for mutual class observation and peer review

⇓

Personal SWOT analysis and enhanced self-confidence

Institutional SWOT analysis as a team exercise, based on class observation as a core component

Documenting, prioritising and action taking

⇓

Becoming better prepared for the external inspection

and

Training needs analysis for long-term development

For practical examples, see the case studies at the end of this guide.

To see examples from different European contexts and to explore the link between individual and institutional self-evaluation, as well as the connection between them and quality assurance, you can take a look at "Quality management in language education" on the CD-Rom: www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/self_assessment.htm.

3.3 Class observation as an integral part of quality assurance and professional development

In language education, class observation is a key component of quality assurance and human resources management, as well as of teacher training and development.

As a complex process and tool, class observation may take various forms and play multiple roles, as shown below.

For in-house quality management, class observation is carried out by those responsible for managing the teaching programme – heads of department, teacher trainers, senior teachers, the academic co-ordinator(s) – on a regular basis, in order to gather relevant data about the teaching and learning practice existing in the school, to identify areas for improvement, to ensure better customer care, etc. Institutions and departments with a clear commitment to quality also encourage and create an appropriate framework for peer observation, to ensure coherence of approach and to promote the sharing of expertise among teachers.

For internal quality assurance, it may be linked to human resources management, for example, incorporated in the recruitment process, it can be part of induction and may be included in or linked to appraisal, especially in language training institutions.

These situations may well be associated also with formative reasons, since proper quality management cannot be conceived without ongoing professional development.

External quality assurance systems in language education usually include class observation as a key element of the inspection process, carried out by external inspectors (EAQUALS, 1999/2004). In addition, it is often a component part of inspector training and the piloting of inspection systems in national contexts (for example, within OPTIMA, Bulgaria; QUEST, Romania; and MAQS, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), or in organisations consisting of chains of schools having their internal quality assurance system (for example, Bell International, the Goethe-Institut and International House World Organisation).

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss the following:

■ In your context, what type of class observation is primarily used or relevant?

■ Who carries it out and how often? What is the duration of a standard class observation in your context?

■ How is feedback given?

■ Is there any action taken as a result of the class observation process?

Unit 3: Systems, processes and instruments for quality management

To close the loop, since observation is a key component of quality control, institutions preparing for an inspection use observation as a stepping stone in their quality assurance processes.

Evidence gathered through class observation, often integrated with action research, and other ways of gathering relevant data, can help institutions both (a) diagnose problems and (b) identify good practice existing in the institution. Systematic data gathering and analysis thus becomes a sound basis for planning teacher training and development.

In a formative context, observation may serve various purposes, such as (i) training; (ii) development and the sharing of best practice; (iii) assessment; or (iv) observer development. Each of these is usually associated with a specific situation, a certain type of observer-observee relationship, and as a result of this, also the "what" and "how" of feedback given may vary, as illustrated synthetically in the table[12] below.

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12   Adapted from Maingay (1988) and Wajnryb (1992: 3), with a few additional elements for exemplification purposes.

Main reason	Where/when	What/why	Who observes	How → feedback
Training	Pre-service	For example, trainee trying out teaching procedures	a) Trainer b) Peer trainee	a) Prescriptive b) Collaborative
Development	Teacher's place of work or an in-service course	For example, the development of self-appraisal skills	Trainer, or consultant, peer as mentor	Less directive, collaborative
Assessment	Pre- or in-service, part of a course or outside a course	To see whether teaching practice is in compliance with assessment criteria	Internal or external assessor	May take various forms or be inexistent
Observer development	The teacher's workplace	For the observer to pick up new ideas or to reflect on teaching by observing someone else teach	Can be a trainee trainer or observer, a peer	Collaborative

According to the stage in the organisation's life, one type or another is preponderantly used, for example:

■ after recruiting new staff members, the developmental purposes, combined with quality monitoring, are top priority;

■ when running an intensive course, with several teachers contributing to course design and taking turns in the conducting of the seminars, class observation (especially "sitting in") serves mainly the purpose of ensuring coherence of approach, efficiency and effectiveness (quality monitoring situation);

■ in the pre-inspection period, all the experienced teachers are involved in class observation, mainly for quality monitoring purposes; most of the teachers and courses are observed at least once (quality monitoring).

Depending on the areas needing improvement, you may want to observe, for example: classroom management, teacher talking time, teacher-learner rapport, learner-learner rapport, learner attitudes and integrating theory with practice (how does teaching and learning practice compare with principles set out in the curriculum, syllabus, etc.).

Further questions and aspects for consideration:

■ matching the support given to needs; judging the quality of the support: what support is provided by the management, by peers, by consultants? Is it adequate? Are there other alternatives?

■ dealing sensitively with staff; collegiality versus impact on students; supportiveness versus loyalty to students as main beneficiaries of the teaching process;

■ aspects to be taken into account: responsibility, descriptors, finding the right language and attitudes to give feedback; how it is done;

■ taking action: what are the penalties and sanctions? How long does it take until you can take action?

■ link to the values model: honesty has to come from the values we believe in.

See the CD-Rom for examples of checklists and observation protocols – and advice on how and what to observe:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/MM_Class_obs.pdf;

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/learners/
  obs%20de%20classe_E.pdf.

Unit 4: Assessment and evaluation of quality – *Galya Mateva*

4.1 Quality systems: types and methods of assessment and evaluation

4.2 Quality systems: evaluation and assessment procedures

4.3 Benchmarking and validation

Summary of Unit 4

The unit discusses aspects of evaluation and assessment of quality processes in education. Part one starts by differentiating between the two concepts. In most cases evaluation is concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes, programmes and materials. Assessment usually measures the degree of achievement of individual learners or institutions and often relates its results to test norms and sets of criteria.

The understanding of the two concepts is further clarified by presenting basic types of evaluation and assessment and relating them to various educational contexts. Special attention is paid to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages where proficiency assessment, namely assessment of students' linguistic and communicative competence in real-life situations, is of paramount importance. Self-assessment is given a priority status in relation to the European Language Portfolio and its wider applications.

Assessment is also highlighted in the context of appraising staff performance (appraisal systems) in quality-driven institutions.

Part two deals with types of evaluation procedures which guarantee quality. It concentrates on aspects of quality assurance and quality control and the ways these are implemented in language institutions across Europe.

The third part explores benchmarking as a quality management tool in a wider social context. After defining benchmarking on a personal and professional level, different types of benchmarking are exemplified, highlighting the need to apply a variety of approaches for enhanced and competitive performance.

In conclusion, some general indicators of quality performance are briefly reviewed.

Unit 4

Assessment and evaluation are central to setting up and implementing quality systems. Schools and institutions developing a quality approach will have ways of assessing the individual aspects of the school's work (like performance in tests), and of carrying out more overall evaluation of the whole operation, using the assessment of the different features.

4.1 Quality systems: types and methods of assessment and evaluation

Is there a need to differentiate between assessment and evaluation in educational contexts?

In English "to evaluate" and "to assess" are used, yet in other European languages there is only one word with the basic meaning of "value" or "evaluate".

"Assessment" and "evaluation" are terms sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes to denote two different processes, albeit closely related to each other. When correctly applied they provide tools and procedures for measuring the quality of educational services.
The verbs "to assess" and "to evaluate" often collocate with words such as: "skills", "ability", "effectiveness", "materials", "programmes", "projects", "plans", "competence", "performance", "aptitude", "institution" and "satisfaction".

■ Evaluate: effectiveness, institutions, projects, programmes, materials;

■ Assess: competence, skills, abilities, performance, aptitude.

Do these word combinations provide useful clues to some differences between the two terms? To what extent do they overlap?

Evaluation, used in quality management contexts, is usually referred to as a three-dimensional process. Firstly, it defines what areas will be assessed, secondly, it points to ways of collecting and analysing data and, thirdly, it provides well-systematised information used for decision making

How about your language? Do you have one term or several for "assess" and "evaluate"?

Which of these nouns are more frequently combined with "assess" and which with "evaluate"?

and developmental purposes by educational institutions. Evaluation is a process which deals with information received as a result of different assessment procedures, therefore, it is often assumed to be a wider concept than assessment. Evaluation can be done internally (using the institution's own expertise) and externally (making use of the services of outside experts). In most cases one evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of various educational processes, projects, materials and programmes, of the system as a whole.

Assessment deals with separate components of the system. It usually measures the degree of achievement of individuals or institutions. For example, one typically assesses the skills, competencies, abilities of individual learners. More often than not, assessment relates its results and methods of investigation to test norms and sets of criteria. Assessment is an integral part of any evaluation procedure.

When evaluating and assessing quality language learning programmes, the following focus points need to be considered:

■ Are our short and long-term planning procedures effective?

■ What is the degree of achievement of our objectives?

■ How far are all staff involved in quality processes?

■ Are we responding suitably to our students' needs?

■ Are we using quality materials and learning aids?

■ Is our working environment stimulating and staff friendly?

■ Are our teaching methods effective and student friendly?

Do you evaluate your educational programmes on a regular basis? How do you do it?

Which of the focus points do you consider priorities at the moment in your own institution?

Types of evaluation processes

Institutions need to use a range of different approaches to evaluation. A wisely selected combination of these is likely to guarantee correct judgment, guiding recommendations and conclusions. To measure the quality of educational services one has to consider the short and long-term developments in an institution, the orientation of activities towards well-established standards as well as clients' needs.

Some language schools and departments across Europe prefer regular, informal evaluation processes which provide quick feedback and readjustments. Others opt for more structured, longitudinal investigations of student and teacher performance which may result in more radical changes. In some countries there are long standing traditions for external evaluations whereas in others, evaluation is done mostly internally.

Which of these types of evaluation do you apply/would you apply to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in your school?

Evaluation is formative when it is applied with the purpose of improving the functioning of an activity. For example, the process of introducing new teaching materials or aids would require formative evaluation done at different stages of the trial. Summative evaluations, on the other hand, are used in order to compare the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving a particular goal. Their intention is to formulate a judgment about the positive and negative aspects of educational phenomena. Evaluation procedures can focus on the products achieved (for example, test results) or on various processes (for example, designing and implementing different syllabus types).

Formative evaluation	Summative evaluation
Longitudinal evaluation	Cross-sectional evaluation
External evaluation	Internal evaluation
Process-oriented evaluation	Outcome-oriented evaluation
Standard-oriented evaluation	Client-oriented evaluation

Methods of evaluation

Having chosen the type or rather types of evaluation processes, one has to decide on the optimal combination of methods for an evaluative investigation. More holistic, naturalistic and subjective methods like observations, journals, portfolios, case study analyses are combined with statistical and testing procedures to yield valid and reliable results. The first group of methods (also termed qualitative) can provide a wealth of information, a variety of facts from multiple sources and angles which, after thorough analysis, can lead to deeper insight into different educational processes. On the other hand, numerical data and rigid statistical procedures (referred to as quantitative methods) can add precision and validate data received through observations, unstructured interviews, portfolios, etc.

Questionnaires, interviews and observations seem to be among the preferred methods of evaluation by many educational institutions.

Could you complete the table with some quantitative and qualitative methods of evaluation? Where do questionnaires and interviews belong to?

Quantitative	Qualitative

Types of assessment

Assessment in language teaching contexts can be interpreted as a tool for measuring the proficiency level of language learners and users. Assessment can be conducted through various testing procedures but also through observations, logbooks, portfolios, etc. Research methods help experts find the optimal balance of objective and subjective procedures to guarantee the validity and reliability of assessment. Different types of assessment complement each other and can be presented as pairs, for example: continuous versus fixed assessment points, holistic versus analytic assessment, subjective versus objective assessment, achievement versus proficiency assessment, norm-referenced versus criterion-referenced assessment, assessment by others versus self-assessment, etc. For more details see the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Chapter 9.

Systems of assessment in quality assurance tend to take a holistic perspective and will look at aspects like:

■ performance assessment (language skills and competences);

■ knowledge assessment (language systems, cross-cultural knowledge);

■ personality development.

Do you follow the progress of your students in all these areas? What is your priority order, if any?

Common reference levels and the need for criterion-referenced assessment

To assess the quality of performance one needs reliable descriptors.

A framework of six broad levels indicating different degrees of language attainment is being put in operation throughout Europe (see the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Each level is described through a set of "can do statements", specifying what learners will be able to do while listening, reading, speaking and writing at each stage of their linguistic development. The performance of each student is measured against thoroughly researched and universally agreed descriptors which play the role of common standards. The process represents a shift towards criterion-based assessment where learners' achievements are judged in relation to standards and not their peers.

In a similar vein, the role of proficiency testing and assessment is growing in importance because it goes beyond classroom tasks and materials to measure learners' ability to cope with real-life tasks and situations. The quality of teaching and learning will increasingly depend on the external validity of learners' language competence, that is, their ability to react adequately to a variety of situations in a changing world. At the same time the role of achievement assessment will remain significant because it indicates attainment levels based on the material covered in class.

On the CD-Rom you find materials illustrating the relevance of the CEFR to quality assurance – for example:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/framework/CEF.htm;

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/LM_Interview_LW.htm.

Can you further speculate on the differences and specific roles of achievement and proficiency assessment?

In what situations is it more important to focus on students' achievements based on the language school syllabus and materials and in what situations is it vital to check their progress in terms of commonly accepted standards (for example, the European reference levels)?

What is the practical application of the CEFR levels? Who will/will not benefit from using them?

The European Language Portfolio and the role of self-assessment

The *European Language Portfolio* consists of three parts: the *Language Passport*, the *Language Biography* and the *Dossier*. The electronic Language Passport is an essential part of *Europass*, a set of documents meant to facilitate self-assessment and the synthetic presentation of one's qualifications and competencies – for example, for international mobility purposes. All language learners and users can assess their communication skills in several languages by completing the self-assessment grid in the Language Passport. For this purpose they will use the common descriptors and try not to underestimate or overestimate their abilities. Their judgment will be moderated by the personal dossier (a collection of tests, projects and sample written work) as well as by standardised international exams. The Language Biography part of the Portfolio will help learners to determine their learning priorities and objectives. The process presents new challenges for all educational institutions which intend to benefit from and, therefore, foster the development of a self-assessment culture across Europe. Quality performance means not only high test results but also the ability to assess correctly one's own progress, to set one's own aims and learning agendas, to achieve continuous and sustainable personal development.

To assess your own communication competencies in several languages using the self-assessment grid, you can access the Portfolio website on the Council of Europe website (www.coe.int/portfolio) or download the electronic version of the EAQUALS-ALTE ELP for adults (www.eaquals.org).

For examples of ELP-related self-assessment instruments, adapted to various age groups, you can take a look at the "Self-assessment" section of the CD-Rom:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/self_assessment.htm.

For ELP-based activities and ideas, see the ECML joint project website:

■ ELP implementation support and Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio (elp.ecml.at);

and the EuroIntegrELP project at: www.prosper.ro/EuroIntegrELP/EurointergrELP.htm.

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss with your partner(s) the following:

What is your experience with implementing the ELP and self-assessment?

How can self-assessment be built more effectively into the overall assessment process of your institution?

Do learners in your context tend to overestimate or underestimate their language competence?

Assessment of staff performance through appraisal systems

A quality culture, as already mentioned, is a learning culture in which all members of the institution are active participants in the process of producing and assessing quality. In this sense, teachers, academic managers and administrative staff are all equally motivated to receive feedback on their performance and get engaged in professional growth activities. This is the main aim of the annual staff appraisals or reviews which assess the performance of staff against an agreed set of criteria.

Appraisal is conducted for accountability purposes (they inform decisions on duties, pay and promotion), for personal and institutional development purposes. In most cases, the appraisal process goes through several phases, namely, of preparation, finding relevant sources of information, filling in a self-appraisal questionnaire, conducting an appraisal interview and documenting the final recommendations.

The appraisal interview consists of opening, analysis, feedback, action planning and closing stages. The analytical stage, respectively the set of questions asked by the interviewer, relate typically to personal goals and values, responsibilities, competencies, results, career aspirations and potential for development. However, the core of the discussion should consist of an exchange of constructive feedback and realistic planning of activities aimed at personal, team and institutional development.

For examples of appraisal and self-appraisal questionnaires and checklists, see the "Self-assessment" and "Internal quality assurance" sections of the CD-Rom:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assessement/self_assessment.htm;
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/internal.htm.

Activities for pair work

1. Devise some items for a self-appraisal questionnaire for teachers. Relate them to lesson planning, teaching methods, students' test results, etc. For example: what is the balance of attention given by me to different students? Are my teaching techniques equally effective with stronger and weaker learners? Are my lesson aims well defined?

2. Prepare some questions and role-play an appraisal interview with a partner.

3. Formulate some questions in the case of a mismatch between the results of self-appraisal and those of appraisal. For example: why do you think that the new teaching materials did not work as planned? How do you interpret your students' feedback sheets?

4. Give some examples of constructive versus confrontational language in a post-appraisal feedback session (statements versus questions, use of softeners like "a bit", use of past tense modals, of imperatives, etc.).

5. What type of assessment scale would you consider more appropriate for the (self-)appraisal questionnaire? Would you use numerical scales (1-3 or 1-5 or 1-10 point scales) or words (very useful, useful, fairly useful, not very useful)?

4.2 Quality systems: evaluation and assessment procedures

Assuming you would like to gain (partial) competencies in a foreign language, what numerical (number of lessons, price) and non-numerical information would you like to gather prior to choosing a school? Who/what can guarantee that you have chosen a quality language institution?

Types of procedures to guarantee quality

Language schools apply evaluation procedures such as: quality assessment (a procedure to measure achievement in a subject or skills area), internal quality assurance (a set of procedures agreed on and applied internally to sustain high standards in the educational institution), external quality assurance, usually referred to as quality control (a well-established procedure to validate quality standards externally) and accreditation (a procedure which grants formal recognition testifying to compliance with quality standards).

Look at the table below. Could you further specify the purpose of these procedures? Comment on some of the methods applied (observation, interviews, scrutiny of written documentation, peer review, self-evaluation, self-inspection, etc.).

Quality procedure	Purpose	Method
Quality assessment		
Quality assurance		
Quality control		
Accreditation		

For a discussion of methods and instruments in relation to various stages of quality monitoring, see also Unit 3 of this guide.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is a broad concept which refers to establishing, monitoring, controlling, assessing and improving quality processes within an institution on an ongoing basis. In the field of education it guarantees high standards in relation to curriculum design and overall strategic planning, choice of materials and technical equipment, learning/working environment, staff development and, generally, to exploring and satisfying clients' needs.

Quality assurance is ensured internally through competent quality management and leadership, through quality assessment and self-assessment procedures, and externally, through quality control. Quality assurance procedures include among other things different observation schemes, long-term staff development programmes, staff review systems, data collecting and feedback systems, methodology and materials evaluation procedures, benchmarking and innovation policies, etc.

Quality-driven institutions apply these on a regular basis. For example, teachers are observed once or twice per term, feedback questionnaires are administered during and after each language course, staff appraisals are conducted at least once during the academic year, etc.

For more details on systems for internal quality assurance, see also Unit 3.

The case studies at the end of this guide illustrate the successful application of quality assurance principles and procedures in concrete institutional contexts.

For more examples, see also the sections on "Internal quality assurance" and "External quality assurance" on the CD-Rom:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/internal.htm;
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/external.htm.

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss with your partner(s) some of the following:

How do you ensure quality assurance in your institution? What procedures do you apply?

How do you obtain and provide feedback from/to clients? Are post-feedback activities documented?

Is there a department or a person responsible for applying quality assurance systems in your institution?

Quality control

Quality control is traditionally regarded as a set of procedures carried out by external experts to validate independently the strengths and weaknesses of an educational institution.

EAQUALS (the European Association for Quality Language Services) establishes and maintains high educational and service standards in its schools by applying quality control through a rigorous inspection scheme and procedure. The inspection scheme is based on the Code of Practice and EAQUALS charters (Information Charter, Student Charter, Staff Charter). It includes basic aspects of quality performance in the areas of teaching and learning, academic management, administrative management, information systems management, student safety and welfare. An inspection is typically done by a team of inspectors in the course of two days.

The national associations for quality control of Poland (PASE), Romania (QUEST), Bulgaria (Optima), Greece (QLS), Italy (AISLi), etc. apply the principles of EAQUALS in the specific context of their countries. Their member schools are inspected on a regular basis. The principles of external quality control apply in the public sector, too, and are usually carried out by inspectors of education.

See the CD-Rom for more information on EAQUALS and various national inspection schemes:
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/framework/standards_e.htm.

The section on "External quality assurance" also comprises information about a range of different approaches to external inspections, together with numerous examples from various national contexts from all over Europe:
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/external.htm.

Is your institution inspected regularly? What does an inspection involve in your context?

How does the pre-inspection process/ post-inspection process impact your school?

Re-visit the different quality models you have discussed in Unit 1 of this guide. In what ways does your inspection scheme reflect these models?

Is there anything else you would like to be included in the inspection scheme so that it reflects more adequately the various aspects of quality teaching and learning?

How do the EAQUALS' areas of inspection compare with your national or institutional inspection scheme?

General indicators of quality performance

In all these procedures quality performance is related both to a set of standards and also to basic indicators like accountability (taking the responsibility for what you are doing and making it public for judgment by others), effectiveness (meeting your goals, achieving the best possible results), efficiency (meeting your goals and, in addition, showing that you have made prudent use of the resources available) and competitiveness (meeting your goals and proving that you are a viable competitor, you can perform in a competitive environment).

4.3 Benchmarking and validation

Defining benchmarking on a personal and professional level

Do we use benchmarking in our daily life? What mechanisms do we use to continually improve our own appearance and performance?

> Benchmarking in a wider social context is a quality management tool. It is used when comparing one organisation with another on some aspect of performance. We search and analyse information on various aspects of performance in which another organisation excels with the aim of improving our institution's performance and current practices.
>
> The strategic approach to benchmarking looks at what is done by an organisation, whereas the operational benchmarking approach is interested in how success is achieved. The data-oriented approach to benchmarking examines the comparison of data-based scores to performance indicators.
>
> To be effective benchmarking must be applied in a systematic and structured way. It goes through detailed data collection, processes and outcomes analysis, and assessment procedures to determine finally why certain performance is superior and how it can be matched and surpassed.

What aspects of performance in a rival institution would you be most interested in?

What would a plan of a benchmarking activity include in your context?

Will you use the operational or strategic approach?

How will you obtain and gather evidence?

What are the potential difficulties?

Typology of benchmarking

Internal benchmarking

It compares processes in different parts of the same organisation in order to identify, analyse and disseminate best practice.

For example, the administrative department in your institution has introduced an effective reporting system. The teaching department would like to apply some of the underlying principles and mechanisms. They will need to do some benchmarking activities.

Functional benchmarking

It compares processes, practices and performance with similar processes and performance of other organisations in the same business (usually in different countries and places). For example, the national associations for quality language services in Europe constantly exchange experience to optimise their performance.

Competitive benchmarking

It compares similar processes and practices of one organisation with those of a successful competitor for the purpose of continuous improvement and greater profitability. For example, you can learn a lot about advertising seeing the new poster or attending a high profile promotional event of a rival institution.

Generic benchmarking

It compares different types of organisations on the basis of a single process, product or activity. For example, a language school can explore the registration procedures in hotels or medical institutions. It can also learn from private enterprises and non-profit organisations in the area of public relations.

Benchmarking-related questions for reflection

Do you apply internal benchmarking in a systematic way in your organisation? How do you proceed?
Are big chains of language schools in a more advantageous position?

How do you apply functional benchmarking in your institution? What are the advantages of this type of benchmarking?

What are the benefits and problem areas of competitive benchmarking?

Do you consider generic benchmarking worthwhile? In what way?

See the CD-Rom for examples of benchmarking applied in the UK educational context:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/MR_
benchmarking.htm.

Indicators of quality

For benchmarking to be useful, it is crucial to identify meaningful indicators. Here are some examples of indicators used for general education in a report on quality in education[13]:

■ attainment (mathematics, reading, science, foreign languages, learning to learn, ICT and civics);

■ success and transition (dropout rates, completion of upper secondary education, participation rates in tertiary education);

■ monitoring of school education (parental participation, evaluation and steering of school education);

■ resources and structures (educational expenditure per student, education and training of teachers, participation rates in pre-primary education, number of students per computer).

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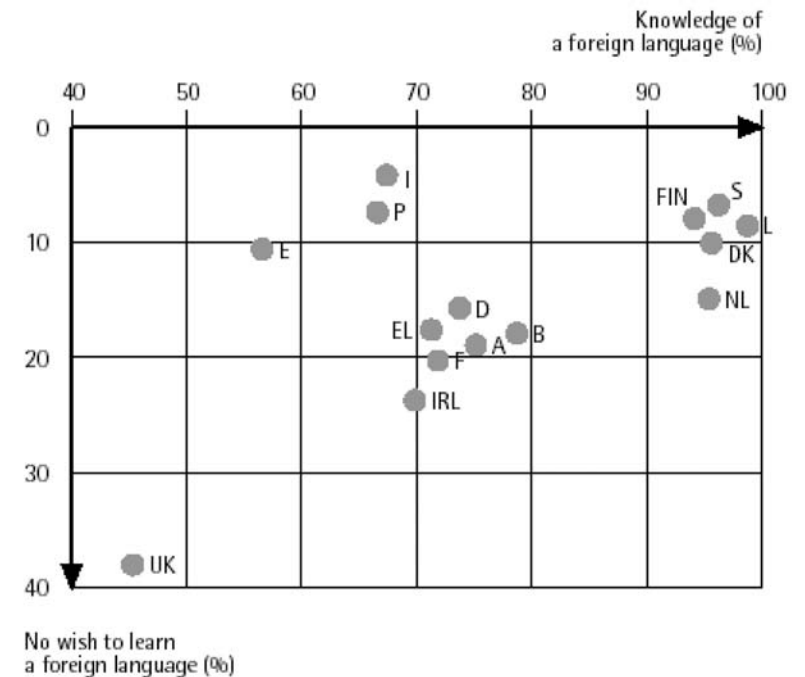
13   European Commission (2000).

The report includes a survey of attitudes to foreign language learning and attainment comparing different European countries.

These indicators are very broad and general. It is much more difficult to develop good (that is, measurable, providing standards to set attainable targets) indicators for the day-to-day management of quality processes in a school.

Summary reflection

Reflect on some of the following key questions.

What indicators might be useful to identify best practice in the following areas?

■ observation of classes;

■ use of the Internet in language teaching;

■ curriculum planning;

■ use of the Common European Framework of Reference;

■ in setting learning aims;

■ in assessing proficiency.

Draft a suitable questionnaire for collecting comparative information on one of the above.

Glossary of terms

Accreditation
Grants formal recognition for observing quality standards.

Action research
"A form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social educational practices" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 5).

Appraisal
Assesses the performance of staff against an agreed set of criteria. Appraisals are conducted for accountability and developmental purposes.

Assessment
Gathers, quantifies and uses information to measure the degree of achievement of individuals and/or institutions. Assessment is an aspect of evaluation.
- **Achievement assessment**: measures the degree of achievement of learners in relation to objectives set by a particular course and its curriculum.
- **Proficiency assessment**: measures the achievements of learners against common reference levels and competences.

Benchmarking
Obtains and analyses information on aspects of performance in which another organisation excels with the aim of enhancing one's own performance. Typology includes internal, functional, competitive and generic benchmarking.

Capacity building
A process of tapping and utilising all available resources (especially human resources) to ensure full commitment to and engagement with the organisation's mission.

Charter
A set of principles and promises a quality association undertakes to observe in order to meet its clients' needs. In the case of EAQUALS there are Student, Staff and Information charters.

Clients
Learners, parents and sponsors are defined as external clients, whereas staff members of a school are referred to as internal clients. "Direct" clients are those who pay for the services provided. "Indirect" clients are those who influence or who are influenced by what an organisation does – for example, employers in relation to school education.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
A comprehensive description of learning, teaching and assessing languages, produced by the Council of Europe. It includes a set of six common reference proficiency levels of language acquisition defined in terms of "can do" statements and learner competences. The underlying theory is the communicative, task-based approach in its linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects.

Criteria
Yardsticks by which the realisation of predetermined objectives can be examined. Statements which reflect quality targets, for example whether a teaching or learning process is effective, efficient, communicative, learner-centred, etc.

Curriculum
An educational programme which sets course objectives, selects and grades course contents (syllabus design), defines its methodology and, based on these, assesses and evaluates performance of learners and institutions. The planning, implementation and evaluation stages of curriculum design are equally important.

Effectiveness
A high degree of achievement of educational goals and requirements.

Efficiency
The process by which one can achieve positive results at a lower cost, without wasted resources, time or money.

Evaluation
A process of collecting and critically analysing data with the purpose of improved decision making, enhanced performance and continuous development of educational institutions.
- **External evaluation**: information/evidence is collected by outside experts who present a thorough analysis (an evaluation report) of institutional performance and make recommendations.
- **Internal evaluation**: a systematic gathering and analysis of information by the institution and its own experts with the aim of improved decision making and quality enhancement.

Indicators

Facts and quantifiable data which can be measured and which will provide evidence about whether certain quality standards have been achieved.

Institutional self-evaluation

Participatory evaluation initiated in the institution (school, language centre, programme) by the school/centre personnel or project team to facilitate periodic or continuous improvement of the teaching operation/language services/the overall activity (adapted from Mackay et al., 1998).

Leadership

It is regarded as a function rather than a role. It recognises the diverse needs of an institution and enables it to develop, to viably respond to opportunities and challenges and to build capacity effectively. Leadership includes moral, strategic, managerial, collaborative and interpersonal aspects.

Mission

The purpose of existence of an institution. It is best expressed in a statement of not more than 50 words.

Observation

A system for investigating classroom performance of teachers and learners with the aim of improving and sustaining standards. Observations are conducted for training, assessment, personal development and quality assurance purposes. Depending on the purpose, observations are typically done by teacher trainers, teachers or inspectors.

Quality

Quality in educational contexts is a multilevel concept and some of the relevant definitions include the treatment of quality as excellence, as enhancement and development, as fitness for purpose and, most importantly, as transformation and ultimately client satisfaction (empowering students with specific skills, knowledge and values).

Quality assurance

A regulatory mechanism which establishes, monitors, controls, assesses, maintains and improves quality processes within an institution on an ongoing basis.

Quality control

A set of established procedures carried out by external experts to validate quality performance of an educational institution. Rigorous inspection schemes (containing quality criteria and indicators) constitute the heart of the inspection procedure. At a more advanced stage, quality control can be replaced by combined self-evaluation and inspection schemes.

Quality culture

A set of behavioural patterns manifested in an educational institution based on a shared vision, mission and quality principles. A self-critical, improving culture which allows all individuals to be involved and contribute to the sustainable professional growth of the organisation.

Quality models

Represent different aspects of quality management and include the client satisfaction model, the process model of quality, the outcomes model of quality, the value-driven model of quality and the developmental model of quality.

Standards

Represent the operational objectives of a quality process and, often, the ways in which performance will be assessed.

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EAQUALS, the Code of Practice and the charters are available at: www.eaquals.org.

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Case studies

Case study abstracts

Case study 1: Setting up a quality management system in a Spanish secondary school – Stephen Hughes

Very often knowledge of TQM does not filter down to the classroom teachers, but instead depends on the school management both for its initiation and continuous implementation. The aim of our case study was to observe the viability of using a continuous improvement framework within a secondary school language department. This involved eight in-service training sessions which, it was hoped, would allow schools to enhance their decision-making processes. The results, in this case, indicated that the application of such a framework was not only viable, but also had the potential to benefit both teachers and students.

Case study 2: Applying quality assurance in a Bulgarian teacher training context – Svetla Dimitrova and Svetla Tashevska

The Pedagogical Portfolio for Foreign Language Teacher Trainees has helped us assure and improve the quality of the pre-service teacher education that we offer by:

■ empowering our students to make sense of their learning and teaching experience and become autonomous reflective practitioners capable of initiating change and managing their own professional growth;

■ enhancing the validity and reliability of the assessment of their professional competence and performance;

■ providing for an effective partnership with school mentors;

■ giving faculty staff an insight into the quality of the training that teacher trainees receive and use the feedback into programme planning and development.

Case study 3: The impact of the media on creating quality in language teaching and training – Michel Boiron

Through its co-operation with the media (TV5MONDE, RFI, etc.), CAVILAM (Centre d'apprentissage et d'enseignement du français, Vichy, France) has established itself as a centre of reference in the field of methodological innovation. CAVILAM implements work procedures involving all staff members and, at the same time, contributes to the provision of new learning and teaching instruments worldwide.

Case study 4a: A quality vision for whole school learning – David Turrell

The Sir Bernard Lovell School has adopted a systematic and comprehensive approach to quality assurance. The approach embodies whole-school self-evaluation, multilevel development planning and a belief in change and improvement using pedagogical innovation. It sees professional learning and school-based enquiry and research as the bedrock to improving the quality of education for its students.

Case study 4b: An ICT quality system to support learning – David Turrell

The Sir Bernard Lovell School has developed a systematic approach to quality assurance in e-learning. This is a response to the considerable growth using advanced technologies. The quality assurance framework has identified four strands for its work: technology, curriculum, learner and verification. These strands assist the institution to take on a client focus. The emphasis is on ensuring a consistent high quality service 24/7. This requires high levels of trust as we ask teachers to try different pedagogical approaches using more and more advanced technologies. These approaches increase emphasis and learning as a strategy for improved educational standards and the encouragement of more self-directed learners.

Case study 5: Developing data-focused self-evaluation at departmental level in the UK educational system – Phil Dahl

The New Relationship with Schools requires all UK schools to engage in self-assessment. NALA (National Association of Language Advisers) is developing an online tool kit for use in MFL departments. The tool kit is intended for members of the association to use in in-service training, support and advice. The open-ended design allows colleagues to see how best to fit their work to teachers' perceived needs in identifying quality issues, interpreting evidence and deciding the best action to take. By starting with practical, "hands-on" approaches, the aim is to encourage further development in reflective professionalism through self-evaluation at departmental level.

Case study 6: Setting up quality systems for German language courses at the Österreich Institut – Brigitte Ortner

The Austrian Institute (Österreich Institut) has the state-appointed task of running extra-curricular German language courses abroad. The centre in Vienna, newly created in 1997, was designed to restructure the language teaching branches of the Austrian Culture Institutes. The previously decentralised language courses were brought into line with consistent, internationally recognised standards. Through continued further training, the teachers were given the means to put these standards into action in the education they provide. A meaningful information and evaluation system was created, which highlights strengths as well as areas for improvement. Steps for the development and assurance of quality are constantly discussed, both internally and externally (www.oesterreichinstitut.org).

Case study 1: Setting up a quality management system in a Spanish secondary school

Stephen Hughes, IES, Bulyana, Spain

Summary of the case study

Very often knowledge of TQM does not filter down to the classroom teachers, but instead depends on the school management both for its initiation and continuous implementation. The aim of our case study was to observe the viability of using a continuous improvement framework within a secondary school language department. This involved eight in-service training sessions which, it was hoped, would allow schools to enhance their decision-making processes. The results, in this case, indicated that the application of such a framework was not only viable, but also had the potential to benefit both teachers and students.

Description of context

Our case study took place in the English department of a semi-private secondary school, Juan XXIII, Zaidín, in Granada, Spain. Of the five teachers in the department, four took part in the project.

What we needed to do and why we did it

The overall aim of our case study was to observe the viability of using a continuous improvement framework, this required facilitating teachers within a secondary school language department with the basic working concepts of quality management, which, it was hoped, would allow them to enhance their decision-making processes.

The theoretical model used in this study was that proposed by Hughes (2004), as seen below, employing decision-making tools mentioned by the same author. Essentially, it is a cyclical improvement process similar to those mentioned in TQM applied to general education and, indeed, in language education, but differs from these in the sense that the first concern of the model is to generate enough teacher support and motivation so as to overcome the initial difficulties involved in implementing continuous improvement.
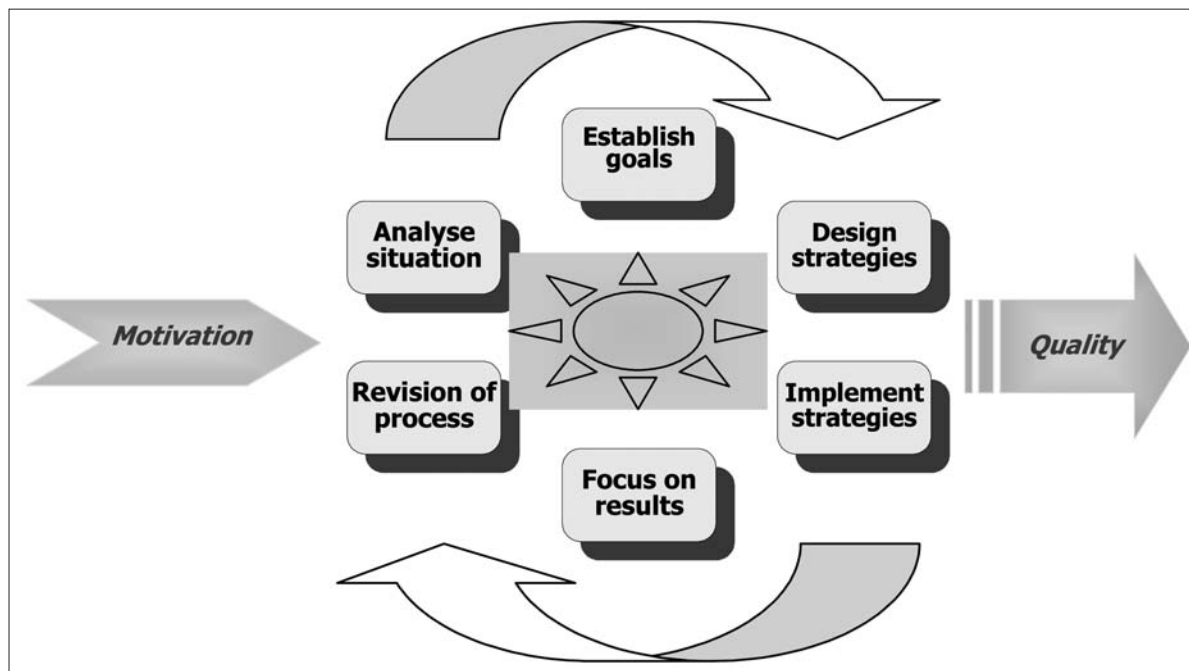
Continuous improvement framework (Hughes, 2004)

Main purpose (what we wanted to achieve)

There were four specific objectives in this project:

1. to present and design a continuous improvement model applied to ELT;

2. to pilot this model in a secondary school;

3. to see whether the model offered any benefits for teachers;

4. to see whether the proposed model offered any benefits for students.

Action taken (stages and procedures)

Motivation and the mission statement

After an initial explanation of the basic concepts of quality management, team members began to draw up their own objectives for the improvement of the department. These objectives were discussed by the team and formed the basis of an agreed departmental mission statement.

Our vision is:
- to have highly motivated students;
- to encourage our students to see that English is useful for them;
- to have students who work and make an effort;
- to have the necessary facilities (including a language laboratory) to carry out our work;
- to have a good atmosphere in class;
- to have students who are able to maintain basic communication in real situations;
- to ensure what is studied here enables students to continue studying and learning (lifelong learning);
- for our students to leave school living this subject.

Our mission is:
- to help students enjoy and like the subject;
- to help them learn values;
- to provide them with the instruments and techniques which allow them to grow personally and academically;
- to stimulate and motivate students so that they can overcome difficulties;
- to help them learn how to communicate in English.

The strategy that we follow is:
- a continuous and permanent improvement strategy which incorporates the vision and initiatives of all – teachers, students, parents and school management.

We value:
- integration and tolerance inside and outside our classrooms;
- real attention to diversity;
- English as a lingua franca in the world;
- the individual work of students and other teachers;
- the respect and personal dignity of each person.

Situation analysis
This session was used to decide upon areas of analysis. The areas to be analysed were student perceptions, parent perceptions and student achievement levels. During the following days, a number of decisions were taken with regard to designing new tools and the adoption or adaptation of existing tools. Once data were collected, they were processed and analysed by the team of teachers in preparation for the following session.

Prioritising objectives and implementing strategies
Participants were given the data from the questionnaires from their individual classes as well as a group score provided by all students. They were also given the results of the Quick Placement Test, vocabulary results and conclusions from the interview with a member of the Board of Governors. With this data in hand, teachers used a prioritisation tool to facilitate decision making (see Hughes, 2004). Some 25 areas were identified and the results from this procedure were used in a flexible manner to help team members decide upon a small number of improvements which were to be undertaken during the rest of the academic year.

Implementation and hypothesis testing
In order to improve various areas, measures were taken to train teachers in the use of new technologies, and planning for vocabulary instruction and acquisition of new materials.

The duration of the case study in the school which employed the whole model was not sufficient to gage specific results in all of the areas earmarked for improvement. One specific area which was documented was improving a process for teaching a grammar item. A revision of the teaching process was undertaken and a new process designed. The traditional form of teaching grammatical elements, such as the present simple, essentially followed the process shown below.
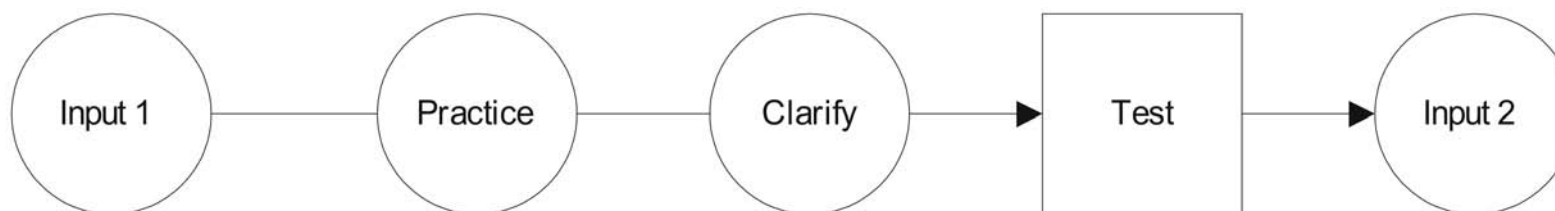
Traditional process map for grammar teaching

After gauging current related knowledge of an area or structure, a new (revised and/or developed) structure would be presented, students would practice and ask questions, they would then be tested, and would sometimes be given reinforcement exercises before being presented with the next area.

The research question at this stage was: if the process were improved, would the results also improve? For this reason a new process was designed. This broke the larger process (in this case, the process of teaching the present simple) into smaller and more manageable sub-processes, whereby students had to gradually master each individual element involved in the unit of learning at their own pace.
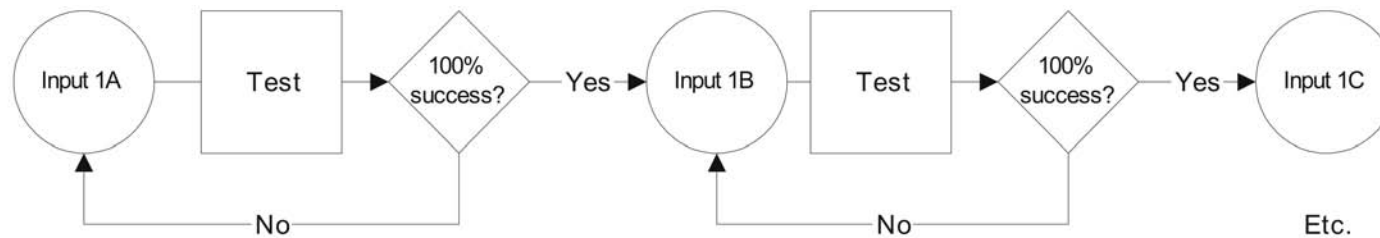
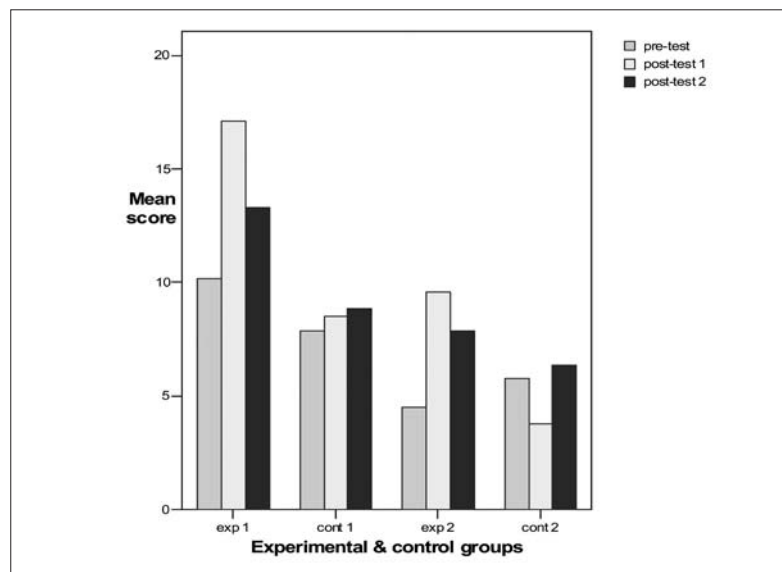*Modified process map for grammar teaching*

In order to see if the modified process would have any effects on student performance, a booklet was designed, whereby students would read instructions, learn the input and test themselves before moving on to a new stage. The treatment consisted in the two teachers giving the experimental group thirty minutes to read and complete the previously mentioned booklet. At the end of this session, students were asked to rate both the perceived level of difficulty of the intervention and perceived level of learning. Two post-tests were later given to the control and experimental groups by two teachers; the first of these took place the day after the intervention and the second (which was identical to the pre-test) took place six months later.

Main outcomes

Teacher results
Among the benefits identified by the team members in an externally conducted semi-structured interview, the following areas stood out:

■ the enhancement of teamwork	
■ learning	■ the focus on practical elements
■ communication between team members	■ planning aspects
■ reflective teaching	■ achievable goals

Performance on pre and post-tests in the grammar experiment

For all participants, teamwork appeared to have been one characteristic of the project which was most beneficial. Teamwork seems to be linked with at least two other areas: the supportive aspect and participation. The area which was directly related to teamwork and the supportive aspect of the team itself was that of communication. This was perceived by one of the interviewees as being a differentiating element in teacher development since team members had the opportunity to participate in discussions about teaching rather than being passively lectured about it.

Student results

In terms of student achievement, the results obtained in our grammar experiment showed that there was a greater degree of improvement among students who underwent the treatment (experimental groups) in both post-tests compared to the performance of students from the control groups. This was important in the sense that it demonstrated to the team that by implementing strategies, outcomes could be improved.

Furthermore, all team members agreed that the overall framework could prove to have beneficial effects on student learning.

Main conclusions

The combined results of this project led us to the conclusion that it was possible, under the right conditions, to achieve improvements through co-operative action research based upon group work in the language department. Among the benefits produced for teachers in the piloted model project are a number of key concerns. Apart from the general and specific results of learning, the project also entailed a realistic vision resulting from the reflection with regards to what may be achieved in the short and long term. It also seems that the use of the model has encouraged the team to reflect on the effects of their teaching upon student levels and needs; it has helped participants to establish indicators and prioritise areas of improvement and, indeed, to agree upon and implement strategies.

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Case study 2: Applying quality assurance in a Bulgarian teacher training context

Svetla Dimitrova and Svetla Tashevska, New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria

Summary of the case study

The Pedagogical Portfolio for Foreign Language Teacher Trainees has helped us assure and improve the quality of the pre-service teacher education that we offer by:

■ empowering our students to make sense of their learning and teaching experience and become autonomous reflective practitioners capable of initiating and capitalising on change while managing their own professional growth;

■ enhancing the validity and reliability of the assessment of their professional competence and performance;

■ providing for an effective partnership with school mentors;

■ giving faculty staff an insight into the quality of the training that teacher trainees receive and use the feedback into programme planning and development.

Description of context

The Pedagogical Portfolio for Foreign Language Teacher Trainees was designed and developed by a team of FLT experts at the Department of Applied Linguistics (now Department of Foreign Languages and Literature) of the New Bulgarian University (NBU), Sofia, Bulgaria, to facilitate the education of pre-service FL teacher trainees enrolled in the BA and MA teacher training programmes. It was officially published in 2004 but the materials in the portfolio had been previously piloted and refined over a period of more than eight years.

What we needed to do and why we did it

We needed a tool which would help trainees structure, document and make sense of their learning and teaching experience, as well as a reliable hermeneutic method of authentically assessing their acquired professional competence and performance. In addition, we needed a manual which would guide the mentors of our trainees into the kind of training they had received and the expectations we had of them, thus strengthening our partnership in the preparation of future teachers. We needed a system of quality assurance and programme evaluation which would provide us with regular feedback to incorporate in the process of programme planning for change and improvement.

Main purpose (what we wanted to achieve)

To assure and improve the quality of the training that we offer to our student teachers of foreign languages.

Action taken (stages and procedures)

The development of the pedagogical portfolio began back in 1994-05 and went through the following stages:

■ needs analysis and identification of weaknesses in the training programme;

■ deliberation over the possible solutions and alternatives for action (the portfolio was only one of a set of actions taken, another one was the unique – for Bulgaria – initiative to set up a one-year MA mentor training programme at the university as well as run shorter mentor courses for qualified skilled FLT practitioners; there was also trainer training for university methodologists, inclusion of an action research component in the programme, extending the teaching practice period to include all four years of training and diversifying the experience offered, attracting funds and foreign expertise, establishing an FL Resource Centre at the library and a professional network (PRENET) for all interested in improving the quality of pre-service teacher training, etc.);

■ reviewing both literature and various examples of good practice;

■ careful planning and drafting of the materials for the portfolio;

■ piloting the materials across the country in various contexts and using the feedback to re-draft and refine the documents;

■ producing the Teaching Practice Handbook for student teachers of English and the Mentor Manual (1998, mimeograph copies);

■ further piloting and re-drafting in the light of the feedback received, and promoting its use in and outside NBU;

■ designing the Pedagogical Portfolio for English Language Teacher Trainees (2001-02, mimeograph) and introducing it formally to the wide professional community as a tool for enhancing reflective practice and self-managing the lifelong learning of the teaching profession, as well as an instrument for quality control in job employment, tenure and promotion;

■ producing and publishing the Pedagogical Portfolio for Foreign Language Teacher Trainees (2004, Sofia, NBU) – the file contains an English and Bulgarian version of the documents and serves as a basis for unifying the requirements for all NBU FL teacher trainees;

■ forthcoming: versions in German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian (the languages offered at NBU) are in the process of development;

■ forthcoming: a generic version of the pedagogical portfolio (as the present one is in some respects tailored to the NBU programme context).

Description of content

The pedagogical portfolio is organised in two parts – main body and appendices. The first part offers some advice on the logistics of FL teachers' preparation and provides guidelines for documenting a trainee's professional biography and structuring the multiple sources of evidence of their professional competence and performance in the dossier in the following three sections:

1. nature and content of the pursued and/or obtained pedagogical degree(s) or qualification(s);

2. university-based professional training;

3. school-based professional training and work and/or experience as a school practitioner.

Some of the highly valued resource materials for training and self-development in this part include:

■ the "Practical teaching objectives" which outline clear goals based on professional standards for "good" classroom teaching;

■ the practical "Advice on planning and evaluating lessons", which enables trainees to critically reflect on their experience and gradually take the responsibility for their own learning;

■ the "Assessment criteria" for (self-)evaluating trainees' pedagogical skills.

The second part (Appendices) comprises a wide range of photocopiable support materials – various sample structured classroom observation sheets, a lesson plan template with a checklist to help the trainee's self-evaluation and action planning, mentor feedback forms, a more global self-assessment framework, a questionnaire inviting trainees' comments on their relationship with their mentor, etc. These reflect the basic theoretical principles translated into specific classroom behaviours and are directly applicable in practice.

Illustration of content

"Practical teaching objectives" (extract):

Category	Comments
Instructions and explanations	Trainees should be able to give clear and easy to follow instructions and explanations. They should be able to state more complicated instructions and make sure that they check students' understanding. They should be able to notice when there is confusion and react to this. The use of Bulgarian should be limited to necessary instances, rather than being a generally applied technique for explaining procedures
Use of mother tongue	Bulgarian should be used justifiably by the trainee, to help or check understanding, to avoid the use of more complicated and/or unfamiliar language and to save time

"Assessment criteria" (extract):

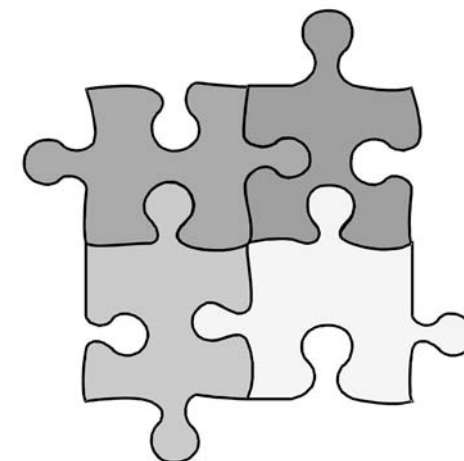| Category	Distinction	Satisfactory	Attention needed
Clarity of explanations/ instructions	Explanations and instructions are clear and easy to follow; students always know what is going on	Explanations and instructions are usually clear; the teacher notices when there is confusion and reacts to this	Explanations and instructions are confused/contradictory/unclear; students often do not know what to do
Use of Bulgarian	Bulgarian is used justifiably to help or check understanding and save time	Bulgarian is not over-used; switching does not confuse students	Bulgarian is used unnecessarily or is not used when needed

Main outcomes

The implementation of the pedagogical portfolio has led to:

■ increasing the effectiveness of FL teacher education (including the quality of FL teaching done by student teachers during teaching practice);

■ contributing to the growth of autonomous, reflective practitioners, capable of continuous professional development;

■ increasing the validity, reliability and transparency of assessment through introducing measurable standards of work and unified assessment criteria of professional competence and performance for the (student) teachers of different foreign languages;

■ improving the relationship between the university and the TP schools through better informing the mentors about the requirements to the student teachers, the stages and methods of their education and assessment of the acquired professional skills, as well as through involving mentors in the evaluation of the trainees' competence and classroom performance;

■ optimising trainees' mobility and employability through informing possible future educators and employers about the content and the quality of the professional qualification of prospective teachers and their potential for professional development;

■ empowering faculty staff to take informed decisions about programme development and improvement, drawing on feedback from portfolio analysis;

■ contributing to the development of criteria for assessing quality in FL teaching (QIFLT) to be used by ministry of education experts at a national level.

Main conclusions

The puzzle of professional competence

The figure of a puzzle can be a good metaphor of the complex construct of the FL teacher's professional competence, as well as of the pedagogical portfolio as a tool for its formation and reflection. In other words, teaching competence and performance are difficult to adequately illustrate and/or evaluate only through the observation of a single lesson, a certificate for the respective qualification, or a paper from a professional forum. However, when all the evidence has been collected and arranged together, revealing the critical thinking of the reflective practitioner, as in the pedagogical portfolio, the mosaic of various components begins to acquire more complete and tangible dimensions, presenting the multifaceted character of this evasive entity – pedagogical competence – in a fuller and clearer picture. The puzzle is also a metaphor of the ongoing process of professional development and improvement, of the open-ended system of the pedagogical competence in which the newly acquired professional knowledge and skills integrate with the teaching experience gathered to make a difference in the quality of teaching.

Case study 3: The impact of the media on creating quality in language teaching and training

Michel Boiron, CAVILAM, France

Summary of the case study

Through its co-operation with the media (TV5MONDE, RFI, etc), CAVILAM, a centre for French studies based in Vichy (France), can be seen as a centre of reference in the area of innovative teaching. It is implementing working procedures that include all staff members and that also contribute to proposals for learning and education tools around the world.

Description of context

CAVILAM (Centre d'Approches vivantes des Langues et des Médias) was set up in 1964 by the University of Clermont-Ferrand and the town of Vichy. Today, it has three main aims: to teach languages and in particular French as a foreign language (3 000 students a year from more than 110 countries); to train French teachers (850 teachers a year); and, finally, applied teaching research, with the creation of teaching materials intended for use all over the world.

What we needed to do and why we did it

Since its establishment, CAVILAM has gained an international reputation in the area of innovative teaching. This reputation is founded on the constant involvement of teachers in innovative projects and in publication and co-operation projects with prestigious bodies, particularly in the media. It has carried out many projects in co-operation with Radio France, France Inter, TV5MONDE and RFI (Radio France Internationale).
Co-operation with the media allows the organisation to concentrate on teaching that focuses on language as a current and up-to-date communication method.

Students at CAVILAM expect the highest quality and for teaching to be in line with the most recent research. Innovation is by definition continuous; it never stops. It is a constant preoccupation; a state of mind.

Moreover, the institution's identity resonates with this brand image: CAVILAM specialises in using media. It is therefore a given that the institute will continue in this vein.

Main purpose (what we wanted to achieve)

The permanent aim of CAVILAM is to position itself as a centre of reference in the area of innovative teaching of French as a foreign language, and as one of the best education training centres for teachers.

In addition, CAVILAM is heavily committed to making tools available to teachers and pupils around the world, which are accessible and easy to use in order to encourage learning and to lead to intercultural reflections.

Action taken (stages and procedures)

An example of a recent project is the interactive multimedia project carried out together with TV5MONDE: "7 jours sur la planète".
CAVILAM has been working with TV5MONDE since 1996 to develop a teaching strategy entitled "Apprendre et enseigner avec TV5MONDE".
The aim of this activity is to facilitate the use of televisual documents in the teaching of French as a foreign language.
It consists, on the one hand, of providing teaching content to the TV5 site (www.tv5.org) and, on the other, of training teachers in different places around the world. Bit by bit, it has involved more and more of the CAVILAM teaching team members.

In 2004 and 2005, in the framework of "7 jours sur la planète", and in co-operation with the international channel TV5MONDE and the Alliance française in Brussels, we developed an online multimedia tool concept aimed at self-learning, face-to-face teaching, and the continuous development of teachers.

The results are available to read and use at: www.tv5.org/enseignants.

The concept includes:

■ a weekly twenty-six minute-long television news programme shown on Saturday mornings on TV5MONDE. This programme discusses the main news items of the week. It is available online from Friday evening;

Case studies

- a complete system of three sequences a week consisting of:

    - six self-correcting online exercises corresponding to three levels of the CEFR: A2, B1 and B2;

    - three pupil worksheets which can be used in class;

    - three teacher sheets which contain a teaching scenario, suggestions for correcting pupil exercises, and hints on teacher self-teaching for each level;

- a transcription of what is said in the document;

- general teaching forms in order to learn how to use the successive broadcasts of the television news: sporting achievements or biography, for example.

The news and the exercises are archived for two weeks before being replaced by the latest news.

Organisation

CAVILAM works alternately with the Alliance française in Brussels.
On Monday there is no material; by Friday evening, just before midnight, everything is online and available to be used for learning.
A team of five teachers works for about sixty hours to produce news exercises. The team is led by a teacher acting as project manager. The editors change regularly so that as many teachers as possible can be included in the "adventure".

Examples of other projects

- Creation of a French course based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 in co-operation with Radio France Internationale and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2005).

- Creation of a teaching companion for a DVD of "choreographic postcards" made up of pairs of dancers from different cultures in the context of the Francofffonies festival (2006).

■ Creation of a teaching booklet based on a text by Léopold Sédar Senghor in co-operation with the International Organisation of La Francophonie and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006).

■ Creation of two teaching companions in the form of short films on DVD in co-operation with the French Short Film Agency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006-07).

■ Creation of a compilation of contemporary French songs and a teaching booklet in co-operation with the French Music Export Office in London and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007).

Main outcomes

1. These projects ensure the institution is internationally renowned in its field.

2. This work with the media puts CAVILAM teachers in a project situation, and therefore in a position to develop and progress at a personal level. As each project has a large amount of added value, taking part in them has many benefits for each participant.

3. All staff members identify strongly with the institution because of the pride associated with the projects that have been carried out. Consequently, this reinforces the personal implications for the success of the daily workings of the association as well as for the well-being of the trainees.

4. Each year, new teaching products that are both innovative and original are made available to teachers and students of French: CDs, educational DVDs, online teaching support, etc.

Main conclusion(s)

CAVILAM considers it absolutely necessary, in the interests of students as well as its own smooth operation, to launch innovative teaching projects on a regular basis. This mainly involves producing teaching materials intended for use around the world. This activity enhances its reputation and makes a significant contribution to the quality of the teaching carried out by its team. It also helps improve staff morale and generates a positive atmosphere within the association as it looks to the future.

This enables the entire team to feel involved in a collective project which is participating in the success of the institution.

In some ways, CAVILAM is trying to succeed on two fronts: firstly, to create economic activity that provides employment to a team of more than 70 people. Secondly, to give form to educational beliefs based on sharing and motivation in learning by making materials available that can be used by both students and teachers of French.

Our sites

- www.cavilam.com, the institute's site
- www.leplaisirdapprendre, the teaching site for teachers of French
- www.cavilam.net, the student news site

Case study 4a: A quality vision for whole school learning

David Turrell, The Sir Bernard Lovell School, UK

Summary of the case study

The Sir Bernard Lovell School has adopted a systematic and comprehensive approach to quality assurance. The approach embodies whole-school self-evaluation, multilevel development planning and a belief in change and improvement using pedagogical innovation. It sees professional learning and school-based enquiry and research as the bedrock to improving the quality of education for its students.

Context

The Sir Bernard Lovell School has consistently improved standards over the last ten years. It has used data extensively to inform decision making and has developed a multilevel development and action planning approach to strategic development creating a culture of self-evaluation.

Vision

The school is committed to a process of continuous improvement. It believes that its work is best enhanced by combining careful detailed refinement and improvement in its processes for learning and organisation, with a more radical paradigm shift based upon school-based enquiry and research, and pedagogical and curriculum innovation. This innovation and creative approach to improvement helps to create a culture which challenges the accepted practices. These practices have failed to achieve the further substantial improvement moving the organisation from providing a very good standard of education to excellent or outstanding. It is our belief that quality assurance based upon a school improvement model, with graduated improvement, will not be sufficient for a further strong change in raising standards, unless it is based upon a framework for equality with a culture of innovation.

Strategies

■ Design a self-evaluation framework focused upon improving teaching and learning.

■ Develop a systematic development and action planning approach at individual, departmental and whole-school level.

■ Develop systematic data and evidence collection at all levels of the school organisation in order to secure the triangulation of evidence to inform change.

■ Develop a systematic professional learning programme which corresponds with the key priorities identified in the Plan for Continuous Improvement.

■ Introduce e-learning approaches which encourage students ownership of learning and staff collaboration to develop and share practices.

■ Develop a culture and climate which sees change as healthy and enriching for the individual and the organisation.

■ Encourage distributed leadership, risk taking and creativity within a framework of evidence-based improvement.

The school understands that it is necessary to develop a holistic approach to quality assurance. Processes need to be transparent and systematic. People need to be engaged and encouraged to find solutions to problems. Creativity and innovation become the dominant culture. The climate is both supportive and intellectually challenging. Systems of review are common place. The vision is understood and enacted through everyday action and discourse.

Case study 4b: An ICT quality system to support learning

David Turrell, The Sir Bernard Lovell School, UK

Summary of the case study

The Sir Bernard Lovell School has developed a systematic approach to quality assurance in e-learning. This is a response to the considerable growth using advanced technologies. The quality assurance framework has identified four strands for its work: technology, curriculum, learner and verification. These strands assist the institution to take on a client focus. The emphasis is on ensuring a consistent high quality service 24/7. This requires high levels of trust as we ask teachers to try different pedagogical approaches using more and more advanced technologies. These approaches increase emphasis and learning as a strategy for improved educational standards and the encouragement of more self-direct learners.

Description of context

The Sir Bernard Lovell Language College is an 11-18 years mixed comprehensive of 1 300 students and 157 staff. The school is on the edge of Bristol in the United Kingdom. It has a strong commitment to using e-technology in learning. Over the past two years, it has invested in substantially upgrading its computer infrastructure. The school has a powerful central system, wireless and cabled infrastructure and over 500 computers. ICT is taught in every year to all students and is very extensively used across all subjects. Some 80% of classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. All staff have laptop computers. The school has 70% PC, 30% Apple technology. These Macintosh machines are serviced by four technicians. The school has developed and customised an e-learning platform which is available to all students and staff, and will, in the future, be available to all parents. This scale and use of provision has now necessitated the development of an extensive quality assurance process.

What we need to do and why we did it

The scale of provision has meant that it has been very important to us that we were able to develop a quality assurance system which was co-terminus with the school self-evaluation process. We were aware that if we did not develop a system which involved all users, we would not be

able to deliver a high standard of education to all of our students. Additionally, e-learning is used as a catalyst for progressive pedagogical change. If the system fails to work effectively, standards will not be reached, students will be demotivated and the pace of change will be inhibited.

Main purpose

To develop a quality assurance system that ensures high quality e-learning experiences for all students and staff.

Action taken

All members of the school's Senior Leadership Group were inducted into a whole school Quality Assurance Framework. The framework, which forms the basis of a whole-school system of self-evaluation and quality assurance, will ensure that our e-learning quality assurance systems become an integral part of the organisation's overall quality assurance process.

The e-learning system of quality assurance is based upon the following framework:

- quality assurance rationale;
- the technology strand;
- the curriculum strand;
- the learner strand;
- the verification strand.

The quality assurance system will:

- maintain a focus on learners as our main clients;
- be transparent;
- have clear criteria for quality;
- be refined over time;
- gather evidence for improvement from a range of sources;

■ have clear expectations of quality and leadership;

■ address the need of all clients;

■ use processes that ensure all user engagement.

Main outcomes

1. The system provides a high quality service 24/7.

2. High level of user trust.

3. Significant impact on educational standards.

Main conclusions

The singular purpose of the school is to educate students to a high standard and to prepare them for an active adult life. The whole-school Quality Assurance Framework is providing us with a system which can be used in different contexts within the organisation. Its implementation will ensure a higher quality service in a complex e-learning environment, helping us to manage pedagogical change.

Case study 5: Developing data-focused self-evaluation at departmental level in the UK educational system

Philip Dahl, NALA (National Association of Language Advisers), UK

Summary of the case study

The New Relationship with Schools requires all UK schools to engage in self-assessment. NALA (National Association of Language Advisers) is developing an online tool kit for use in MFL departments. The tool kit is intended for members of the association to use in in-service training, support and advice. The open-ended design allows colleagues to see how best to fit their work to teachers' perceived needs in identifying quality issues, interpreting evidence and deciding the best action to take. By starting with practical, "hands-on" approaches, the aim is to encourage further development in reflective professionalism through self-evaluation at departmental level.

Description of context

Teams of Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teachers in UK secondary schools work in a professional context where outcomes from exams and tests are used nationally and politically to compare schools. Every "school improvement plan" has to focus on their relative performance in terms of "standards of attainment" and identify improvements. Changes in national inspection require school self-evaluation to relate its improvement activity to its impact on results. MFL departments are now facing the challenge of developing their own self-evaluation techniques and procedures to identify and prioritise strategic change management.

What we needed to do and why we did it

Members of NALA work with MFL teachers at various levels. Most members are experienced in inspection-related and local authority monitoring at whole-school level. In the changing context of school self-evaluation, NALA wanted to support its members in their work on self-evaluation at departmental and classroom level.

Main purpose (what we wanted to achieve)

NALA asked its working group to design a tool kit approach mainly for members to adapt to the perceived needs of specific groups of teachers in in-service training, in-school advice and ongoing support.

Action taken (stages and procedures)

Defining the approach

We wanted to make our approach as "developmental" as possible. Principles of "reflective practice" informed our initial outline. This tended to involve a good deal of "clarification" before we felt able to pin down the practical "hands-on" design of a tool kit we knew our members and their colleagues would be able to adapt to their own purposes. We chose the title "Let us show you how good they are".

Developing the framework

This core focus on learners' progress and achievement has remained central throughout our development work. This puts the learners centre-stage, rather than data and statistics. All the many facets and aspects of our work as language teachers relate entirely to the learners' experience and the benefit they derive, not simply end results. An experimental approach led to the "key questions" design to the tool kit we are developing. Flexibility means that the whole tool kit can be accessed as appropriate to different circumstances and varying experience in self-evaluation.

Designing the tool kit as an online resource

Developed very much with flexibility of access and ease of application in mind, the online framework focuses on what is vital (a "QuickStart" self-evaluation) as a lead into more in-depth analysis led by the key questions: what counts (using data); what works (appraising provision); what matters (taking stakeholders' views into account); what action (prioritising action for effective change); and what impact (evaluating the effects of action taken)? To view the tool kit in its latest state of development, go to www.practicalinclusion.org.uk/nala.

Developing and uploading "tools"

Developing and uploading "tools" develops with lessons learned, especially the need to focus on what is specific to languages learning, rather than generic to any subject. To date, we have the combined experience of analysing results and the monitoring from members working in local authorities. As our work progresses and piloting gets under way, we will be looking to develop tools relating to different aspects of provision, learners' experience and stakeholders' views to inform our strategies both to train, advise and support as well as to develop quality provision and practice in schools.

Case studies

Developing self-evaluation experience
NALA exists to draw together and combine the professional expertise of its members. This works through national and regional networks, as well as through the members only website. Developing self-evaluation experience has to find its place alongside many other competing pressures on both members in NALA and teachers/MFL subject co-ordinators in schools. Piloting and developmental work will continue, new tools will be tried out and our combined self-evaluation experience will grow. Through the online tool kit, we trust that members will be able to share and learn, contributing to the quality of languages learning in our schools.

Main outcomes

■ An accessible, flexible and developmental framework in tool kit form.

■ A practical and grounded approach to self-evaluation through key questions.

■ The basis for updating and developing the tool kit as experience grows.

Main conclusions

■ It is vital to clarify a working and grounded approach for "hands-on" practical approaches to self-evaluation if colleagues, nervous of evaluation, can confidently build skills.

■ Flexibility of access and application are fundamental to developing effective self-evaluation approaches to match different circumstances and varying experience.

■ We recognise that we have yet to see how well proactive, developmental approaches to self-evaluation can be developed in our highly performative context.

■ Developing and trialling tools specifically matched to the intrinsic issues facing languages teaching and learning relies on combined professional experience and critical judgment.

Case study 6: Setting up quality systems for German language courses at the Österreich Institut

Brigitte Ortner, Austrian Institute, Austria

Summary of the case study

The Austrian Institute (Österreich Institut) has the state-appointed task of running extra-curricular German language courses abroad. The centre in Vienna, newly created in 1997, was designed to restructure the language teaching branches of the Austrian Culture Institutes. The previously decentralised language courses were brought into line with consistent, internationally recognised standards. Through continued further training, the teachers were given the means to put these standards into practice in the education they provide. A meaningful information and evaluation system was created, which highlights strengths as well as areas for improvement. Steps for the development and safeguarding of quality are constantly discussed, both internally and externally (www.oesterreichinstitut.org).

Description of context

In 1997 the state-led language-teaching branches of the Austrian Culture Institutes abroad were separated off into a privately run organisation and given the official task of overseeing German language courses at an international level. In 1997, Die Österreich Institut GmbH (Austrian Institute) took over five independently acting organisations with approximately 3 400 course participants a year. Subsequently, the number of institutes rose to nine (2005) and the number of course participants rose to around 10 000. Each year, there are currently around 65 000 modules taught and 3 500 examinations for the Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch (ÖSD) (Austrian Language Diploma in German) are taken.

What we needed to do and why we did it

■ The decentralised language courses were brought into line with consistent, internationally recognised standards (EFR).

■ The teachers had to be given the means to put these standards into practice in the education they provide.

■ A meaningful information and evaluation system had to be created, which highlights strengths as well as areas for improvement.

Main purpose (what we wanted to achieve)

The unification of the structures which had developed independently from one another was essential. This was achieved through simultaneous observance of cultural differences in markets and in key people. Our goal was – and is – to offer the current public an attractive extra-curricular German language programme which does not shy away from international comparisons.

Action taken (stages)

- Development and communication of action plans both internally and externally (Payerbacher Positionspapier, 1998).

- Development, implementation and communication both internally and externally of a binding curriculum across all institutions supported by progression tests and recommendations for teaching material (start: 1998; implementation: 2002; adaptation ongoing).

- Development and implementation of a course of study for the further training of the Austrian Institute teachers (start: 1998; graduation with certificate: 2002).

- Development, implementation and communication of a quality charter (accompanying the course of study for further training: 2002).

Parallel to this was development and implementation of:

- guidelines for teacher employment discussions;

- structures for transparent communication of the requirements of teachers;

- a job profile for teachers including a self-assessment test;

- guidelines for teachers' personal development in accordance with the medium-term development plans of the whole institution as well as individual institutes;

- guidelines for the annual employee reviews;

- customer satisfaction evaluation forms, which include the reflections of the individual learner on the achievement of his learning goals;

- the acquisition and documentation of statistical data pertaining to the age and occupational background of course participants, their reasons for learning German and the level achieved.

Job profiles, guidelines for employee reviews and further training programmes were developed for institute leaders as well as administrative staff. They are constantly adapted to meet changes of all kinds.

All measures towards quality assurance are communicated externally (website, quality charter, descriptions of learning goals, etc.).

Action taken (procedures)

The establishment of a learning organisation, in which each individual in his/her own area feels duty-bound to fulfil the organisation's goals thereby making small-scale checks unnecessary, yet guaranteeing constant further development, required the inclusion of all people, in all areas of the quality development process.

The action plans were prepared in conjunction with the institute leaders as follows: the quality charter came from the cross-institutional course of study for further training; before its implementation, the curriculum went through an intensive process of suggestion, trial, reworking etc. Also the evaluation by the course participants gathered from the evaluation forms for customer satisfaction, which teachers find especially tricky, went through a series of discussions and adaptations, taking teachers into account.

Main outcomes

■ Satisfied and successful learners: high take-up rate, low drop-out rate, high success rate (measured by graduations); international comparability (EFR) of the achieved language level paired with an education which puts the interests of the learners at its core.

■ Engaged teachers who are interested in further training and see themselves as playing an important role in the organisation. "When I teach well, I assure the good reputation of the organisation and my job too!".

■ Strong identification of all employees within the organisation. Low staff turnover, openness towards new programmes, high level of initiative, mutual self-evaluation, good team building.

Main conclusions

Through a complex combination of in-service teacher training with measures to define, develop, assure and evaluate quality standards at the organisational – as well as the teaching – level, it has been possible to establish the Austrian Institute as an organisation with a reputation for modern teaching standards and quality assurance.

The key points of the organisation's development process were: the qualifications of the teachers and their continued further training; the implementation of quality standards in the educational sector in the form of an independently developed curriculum; and the implementation of feedback processes for customer satisfaction that provide regular information about product acceptance as well as participant-focused indications for quality improvement. This process, as far as an innovation is concerned, combines technical content with the main requirements facing the development of the whole organisation.

QualiTraining

A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education

QualiTraining
– A Training Guide for Quality Assurance in Language Education

Laura Muresan, Frank Heyworth, Galya Mateva and Mary Rose

There is growing interest in national and regional contexts for standard-setting in areas such as evaluation, approaches to quality control and management. In the first medium-term programme the ECML project "Quality Assurance and Self-assessment for Schools and Teachers" developed a CD-Rom entitled "Quality Management in Language Education". Building on the outcomes of this project, this publication - a training guide for teacher trainers and multipliers responsible for quality assurance in language teaching at various levels in the educational system - has been produced. The guide aims to provide them with a complementary tool for this work, linking theory to practice with illustrative case studies from a variety of sources.

The Council of Europe has 47 member states, covering virtually the entire continent of Europe. It seeks to develop common democratic and legal principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals. Ever since it was founded in 1949, in the aftermath of the second world war, the Council of Europe has symbolised reconciliation.

http://www.coe.int

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