

# Quality Assurance Standards

A synthesis of quality standards across partner countries

Vanessa Dodd and Erik Hagaseth Haug



Erasmus+

Co-funded by the European Union



## Contents

Tables and Figures .....	3
Partners .....	4
About this project .....	5
About this report.....	6
About quality assurance in career guidance.....	6
What is quality and quality assurance?.....	7
Quality assurance as policy .....	7
Typical features of the regulatory approach include: .....	8
Typical features of the advisory approach include: .....	8
Typical features of the organic approach include:.....	9
Typical features of the competitive approach include: .....	9
Overview of data collection .....	9
Findings .....	10
What types of labels were submitted?.....	11
Mentoring programme for career guidance practitioners.....	11
Certification procedure for career guidance professionals.....	13
Quality development framework for organisations providing guidance .....	15
Audit/labelling procedure for organisational providers of career guidance .....	18
Discussion.....	22
Conclusion .....	24
References.....	26
Appendix 1. Audit template. ....	27
Appendix 2. Standards submitted, at what level they accredit and whether they are compulsory. ....	33

## Tables and Figures

Table 1. Submissions per partner country. ....	9
Table 2. Partner countries and quality standards submitted.....	10
Table 3. Certification level of the quality standard. ....	14
Table 4. Level of standard. ....	15
Table 5. Further information at the standard level. .... <b>Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.</b>	
Table 6. Quality standard assessment type .....	19
Table 7. Resources listed to support quality standard process. ....	19
Table 8. Accreditation length .....	22
Figure 1. Summary of outputs. ....	5
Figure 2. Hooley and Rice model of QA certification. ....	8
Figure 3. Reflective practice and action research cycles.....	18

## Partners

**Association for Career Guidance and Career Development, SK** (ZKPRK) – coordinator of the project initiative, association of career professionals in Slovakia ([www.rozvojkariery.sk](http://www.rozvojkariery.sk))

**BKS Uspech**, SK – applicant organization, career guidance and training provider, ISO certification expert ([www.bksuspech.sk](http://www.bksuspech.sk))

**OZ Better Future**, SK – non-profit association working in career guidance ([www.ozbuducnost.sk](http://www.ozbuducnost.sk))

**NOLOC**, NL - Dutch association for career professionals with about 2700 members ([www.noloc.nl](http://www.noloc.nl))

**German National Guidance Forum in Education, Career and Employment**, DE (nfb) – creator/coordinator of the national QA system for guidance ([www.forum-beratung.de](http://www.forum-beratung.de))

**International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS)**, UK - applied research centre specialising in career development and employability (<http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/icegs/>)

**ABIF**, AT - independent social science research and consulting institute with a clear focus on practical application of research ([www.abif.at](http://www.abif.at))

**Association for Career Guidance and Career Development, CZ** – newly created sister organisation of ZKPRK in Czechia

**Inland Norway University of Applied Science (INN)**, NO – research institution



SDRUŽENÍ PRO KARIÉROVÉ PORADENSTVÍ A ROZVOJ KARIÉRY



SPOLUPRÁCOU PRE LEPŠIU BUDÚCNOSŤ  
VELKÝ MEDER  
TEAMWORK FOR A BETTER FUTURE

## About this project

The goal of this project is to

- review current national and transnational quality assurance processes,
- develop a certification/accreditation procedure for career guidance practitioners, and
- create a quality assurance framework for provider organisations.

The project also seeks to develop a programme of support for individuals and providers including a mentoring programme for career guidance practitioners and resources for providers to ensure they are working toward or maintaining the award such as an auditing or labelling procedure.

For the purpose of this project we will use the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) adopted definitions to guide our work on quality assurance systems.

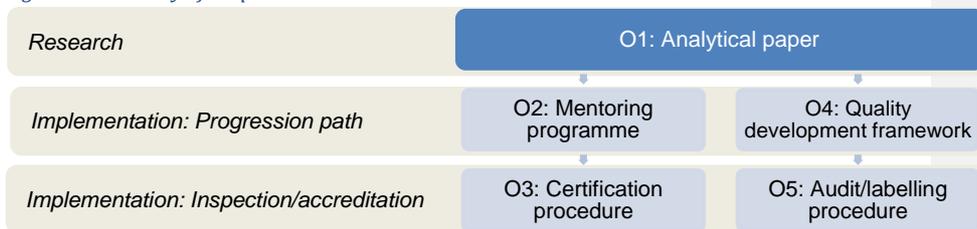
**Quality assurance** are activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that guidance activities (content of programmes, design, assessment and validation of outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders

**Quality standards** are the standard(s) that an organisation sets for all of its key business operations and that help clarify what an organisation expects of its employees in delivering these operations or a client can expect when using the service. They can refer to the systems and procedures developed by career practitioners and stakeholders in the career sector that:

- define the career sector, its membership and its services;
  - recognise the diverse skills and knowledge of career practitioners;
  - guide practitioner entry into the sector;
  - provide a foundation for designing career practitioner training;
  - provide quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders in the sector;
- and/or
- create an agreed terminology for the sector.

Figure 1 details the process by which we will engage with the outputs for the purpose of the Erasmus + project. The report is the first of five outputs of the ongoing Erasmus+ project.

Figure 1. Summary of outputs.



## About this report

This report analyses the current state of different transnational and national quality assurance (QA) practices in career guidance within partner countries. This report focuses on identifying the variation of different approaches, the factors that enable these approaches and the impact of these different approaches. The conclusions from this work will be used to develop four outputs (O2-05) in order to strengthen the implementation of different quality standards in partner countries.

The report will present findings and recommendations for the following points:

- What is the real usage and spread of different trans-national quality standards and referentials for individual counsellors (European Career Guidance Certificates, NICE etc.) and for institutional providers of career guidances (e.g Quality Label “Bilan de compétences”) What is the real impact of these standards for the professionalization of career guidance provision?
- How are different quality assurance approaches (focused on policy, organization, process, people, outputs/outcomes, consumption), used in selected european and non-european countries?
- How are different guidelines for career guidance strategies and policies implemented in different countries? What are the main challenges and how are they dealt with in different countries?
- What best practices can be found that illustrate the main approaches in quality assurance in career guidance?
- Content analysis of quality standards: What are the main quality areas in quality standards for career guidance counsellors and for organizational providers of career guidance?
- Analysis of the relative weight of different components of quality standards: Which content elements/quality areas are key for the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance? Which ones are the most “difficult” to observe for individual counsellors and organizations?
- What mechanisms are used to foster the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance for individual counsellors (e.g. mentoring)?
- What mechanisms are used to foster the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance for organizations providing career guidance (quality development tools, self-evaluation, pre-audit procedures)?
- What specific policy recommendations can be inferred from these findings?

## About quality assurance in career guidance

This project builds on the experience of previous projects and initiatives in the field of quality assurance in career guidance. The Resolution of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) Council 2008/C 319/02 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies led to the development of different quality standards for individual counsellors and organizational providers of career guidance.

The ELGPN (2012) recommended that quality assurance should be one of seven key features of a lifelong guidance system. The report recommends that in regard to quality and quality assurance, there should be:

- clear professional standards established for guidance practitioners working in a variety of different roles in different sectors.
- standards linked to career progression routes for guidance practitioners, which include progression to and from related occupations.
- standards for practitioners complemented by organisational quality standards.
- continuing improvement of the design and implementation of guidance services and of guidance tools and products promoted through citizen/user involvement and through the application of citizen entitlements.
- an evidence base which includes systematically collected data on the financial and human resources devoted to career guidance (including cost-benefits to governments and to individuals), on client need and demand, on the characteristics of clients, on client satisfaction, and on the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of different forms of careers provision (including on-line and off-line provision).

These recommendations build on the experience that in many countries (especially those with little to no tradition of providing career guidance) the implementation of quality assurance standards is lacking. The recommendations are relevant for countries with a long and strong tradition of career guidance for adults.

#### What is quality and quality assurance?

When we think of quality we often think of goods or services delivered to a high standard (Hooley and Rice, 2018). Sultana (2018) argues that the term 'quality' is difficult to operationalize because it is a complex and contested concept. A definition of quality in general and abstract terms without context is difficult. Sultana (2018) suggests that quality is subjective and means different things to different people. Individual differences exist in the *expectation* of career guidance services as well as individual differences in the *experience* of career guidance services.

Sultana suggests that quality concepts have both political and power dimensions. Community and societal values are influential in determining expectations and experiences of career guidance services. What we think of as high-quality products and services depend on heavily on our values which may vary at the macro level from society to society or at the group level within society. As a result it is important to be mindful of who is defining and constructing meaning as well as for whose benefit.

#### Quality assurance as policy

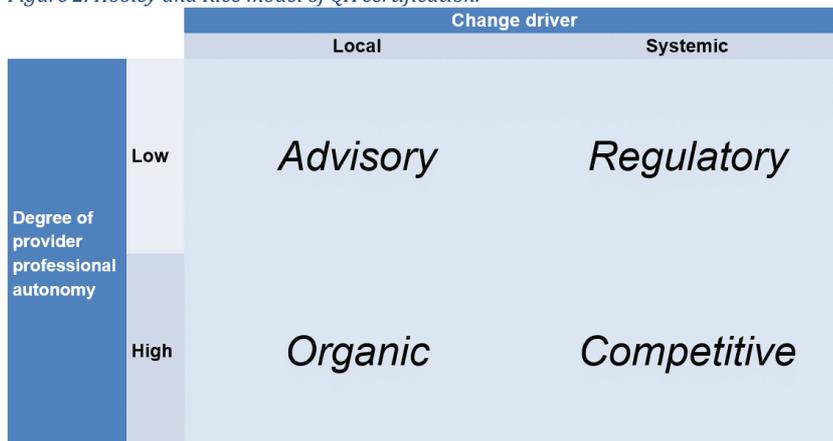
When career guidance is part of national or international policy there are often differences between the initial policy directive or guidance and how it is delivered practically (Hooley and Rice, 2018). Career guidance activity may even act against its original policy aim. Quality assurance processes can help to provide checks that career guidance services are consistent in its offer and fulfil the original policy aims.

It is not only difficult to conceptualise quality in career guidance; it is also difficult to measure. Hooley and Rice (2018) suggest that the following constraints on measuring quality in career guidance should be recognized:

- Services are not tangible.
- Services are tailored to individuals.
- Production, sale and delivery of services are simultaneous in career guidance.
- There may be a possible lack of competition in the industry.

Hooley and Rice (2018) present a model of four different approaches of career guidance quality assurance procedures. Their approach parses out the nuances of systems where it is compulsory to have a quality assurance label in order to deliver versus systems where quality assurance labels are voluntary certification. The model is also useful in understanding the mechanisms of standard certification.

Figure 2. Hooley and Rice model of QA certification.



The following section list the common features of each of the four approaches articulated:

Typical features of the regulatory approach include:

- Legal requirements and formal standards
- Inspection regimes
- Practitioner registration (incorporating qualification requirements)
- Regulations about facilities
- Regulations around outputs (for example, a requirement that a school or career guidance facility must provide a certain number of individual counselling sessions per year).

Typical features of the advisory approach include:

- Models, benchmarks and exemplars of good practice
- Provision of support for providers and professionals
- Driven by moral rather than legal pressure

Typical features of the organic approach include:

- Quality is defined by the provider and the professional.
- Driven by professional values and the desire to do a good job.
- Mechanisms include quality circles, supervisory arrangements, peer observation and mentoring, professional networks and local self-evaluation.
- Involvement of users as co-producers.

Typical features of the competitive approach include:

- Quality driven by customer responses to information on outcomes
- Consumer feedback
- League tables
- Outcome focused
- Payment by results

### Overview of data collection

The first output of the project is completion of an analytical paper synthesizing information on quality assurance (QA) processes used in partner countries. Findings from the report will inform the development of the four subsequent outputs. Data collection protocols were agreed during the October 2017 launch meeting of the project in Bratislava, Slovakia.

An audit template (Appendix 1) was created to gather qualitative data about QA processes in each partner organisation's country. Partner organisations were asked to complete one template for each quality standard available in their country. Table 1 lists the number of submissions from the country in which the partner organisation exists.

*Table 1. Submissions per partner country.*

<b>Partner Country</b>	<b>Number of Submissions</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	4
<b>Germany</b>	6
<b>Norway</b>	1
<b>Czechia</b>	3
<b>England</b>	2
<b>Slovakia</b>	2
<b>Austria</b>	3
<i>Total</i>	<b>21</b>

A total of twenty-one templates were collected for analysis. Some data were inputted into excel for ease of analysis. Content analysis was used to synthesize the qualitative findings. In some instances, descriptive statistics were used to best make sense of the data.

## Findings

The following section details the results from the audit template. Table 2 details the partner countries and the standards audited. Some countries completed the template for international standards, many for their own national standards and one partner country audited a standard also used in France (Qualite Totale CIBC).

Table 2. Partner countries and quality standards submitted.

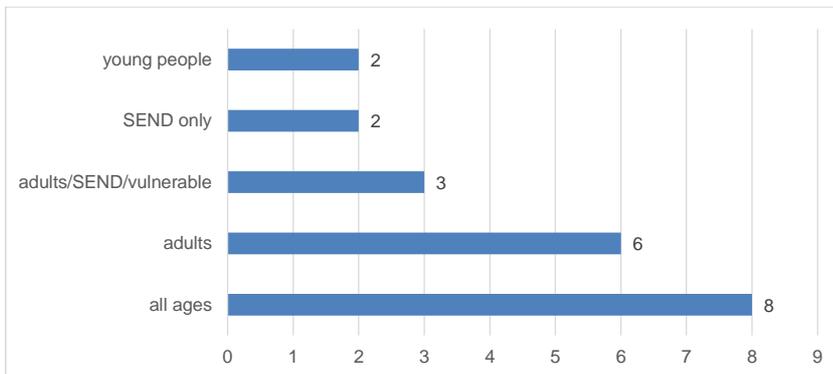
Partner Organisation Country	Quality Standard
<i>The Netherlands</i>	Noloc Erkend Loopbaanprofessional (Noloc Acknowledged Career Professional)
	OVAL
	Blik op Wer Keurmerk
	Register Loopbaanprofessional / Registered Career Guidance Professional
<i>Germany</i>	BerufsBeratungsRegister (Career guidance register)
	Quality Frame Berliner Model
	Kundenorientierte Qualitätstestierung für Beratungsorganisationen
	BeQu Standard
	Quality Standards for Guidance Practitioners in the Area of Education, Career and Employment
	Certified provider of educational guidance and counselling
<i>Czechia</i>	Euroguidance National Career Guidance Award
	Quality standards of supported employment
	IMPROVE – project Improving Validation of Not-Formal Learning in European Career Guidance Practitioners
<i>Norway</i>	Recommendations for guidance in schools
<i>Slovakia</i>	Qualité Europe Bilan de Compétences
	Qualite Totale CIBC
<i>Austria</i>	European Career Guidance Certificate
	Certified Adult Educator
<i>United Kingdom</i>	The Matrix Standard
	Quality in Careers

### What types of labels were submitted?

Partner organisations estimated the number of individuals and organisations accredited with each label if the specific number was not known. Most quality standards submitted were for organisations with an average of 415 organisations per standard. There was a large range and variation with one label having one organisation and another having 1823 organisations. Seven labels were for individual practitioners with an average of 448 individuals certified under the label. Again there was a large amount of variation where the smallest amount certified was 40 individuals under one label and 1400 individuals certified under another.

Most of the labels submitted were for individuals or organisations working with all ages (38%) or adults (29%) only. Only two labels were targeted for services with young people and two labels certified providers of career guidance for special education needs and disability (SEND) clients.

Table 3. Quality label target group.



Most quality labels (67%) had costs associated with the process. The average cost per quality label was up to 3267 Euros with a range of one label with a total cost of 262 Euros and another up to 7,500 Euros when accrediting large organisations.

### Mentoring programme for career guidance practitioners

Mentoring relationships come in two primary forms:

- **Goal-related (instrumental) support.** This type of mentoring relationship focusses on mentee success and advancement in relation to a set of goals articulated prior to the relationship.
- **Psychosocial (developmental) support.** This type of mentoring relationship focusses on the supporting the mentee as they develop their sense of identity, competence and effectiveness as a professional (Allen, Finkelstein and Poteet, 2009).

Allen, et al. (2009) suggests that a needs assessment should be completed prior to designing a mentoring programme. Questions from the audit template provide a useful starting point to discuss the needs required for a quality standard mentoring

programme. We collected data on a variety of topics including information about quality standard implementation challenges and types of resources made available for each standard. This information will be used to help inform the creation of a mentoring programme that can be accessed as part of the quality standard process.

Most quality standards in the partner countries did not use mentoring as a part of their resources to support individuals or organisations through the accreditation process. Three out of 21 completed forms stated they had a mentoring programme.

Only 14% of quality standards audited had a mentoring programme as a part of the accreditation journey for individuals and organisations.

Although most quality standards audited did not explicitly state the use of mentoring programme to support individuals or organisations through the journey, most of quality standards audited did have bespoke resources to guide the process. These resources will be discussed further in the section on audit and labelling procedures.

There are several common elements to consider when developing effective mentoring programmes:

- **Context.** The location of mentor-mentee meeting (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, and Taylor, 2006). Will the mentoring programmes be face-to-face at the organization? Will the mentoring be conducted online? Will the mentoring programme be a blend of the two?
- **Structure.** The nature of the mentor-mentee relationship. Will the mentoring be one-to-one or group mentoring?
- **Goals.** What are the goals for the programme? Is it successful implementation of the quality standard (instrumental) or will other elements of professional development (developmental) be included?
- **Infrastructure.** The infrastructure for a mentoring programme refers to the recruitment, training and ongoing support for mentors.
- **Dosage.** This refers to the amount (total hours of contact time), intensity (relevant to developmental mentoring) and duration (total length) of the mentoring programme.

In the Netherlands, Career Management Institute (CMI) Netherlands provides a mentoring programme for those seeking the quality label. CMI mentor regulation documents were provided in order to further understand the quality standard's mentoring programme. The document provides useful information on the infrastructure of a quality label mentoring programme. The document details how mentors are recruited, mentor competencies, mentor responsibilities and mentor training.

The CMI mentoring programme is an example of goal-related mentoring support. CMI provides mentors to enable candidates to achieve one of three types of quality labels available.

For Type A, the CMI quality label focuses on the client. The following documents and evidence are required:

- Recent CV
- 2 examples of ethical conduct
- Education at higher professional education / university level, supplemented with professional knowledge.
- Per knowledge sector 1 described example.
- 3 descriptions of relevant life experiences  
In relation to the exercise of the profession
- Work experience: 7 years of work experience  
of which 3 years of specific work experience as a career professional
- 5 signed satisfaction statements from ex-clients
- Demonstrate: 3 of 8 tasks within the task areas outplacement, career counseling and career coaching to practice
- examples of the 5 specific competences at level A
- Case studies Professional development  
2 integral guidance programs.  
The case studies should be written at the A level

### **Summary of CMI Mentoring Regulations**

#### *Who are mentors?*

Registered career professionals who are certified at a determined level (C Level). Mentors are invited by a council. A representative for the board responsible for mentors will assess the potential mentor and put a vote to the board. Prospective mentors must submit information about their visibility in the field. Mentors serve for a period of three years and can be appointed twice.

#### *What do mentors do?*

Mentors advise at the request of the board. They serve two functions: they supervise candidates and assess candidates however they cannot both supervise and assess the same candidate.

#### *How are mentors trained?*

Mentors are trained in group sessions. They attend at least one review session as an observer. New mentors complete one reflection of their assessment. Mentors can access training opportunities several times a year with mandatory attendance of at least one training per year. Mentors must attend two joint meetings a year with the council

### **Certification procedure for career guidance professionals**

In the collected templates, partners were asked to describe certification procedures for career guidance professionals and/or career guidance organisations. Hooley and Rice (2018) argues that the development of quality standards, including certification

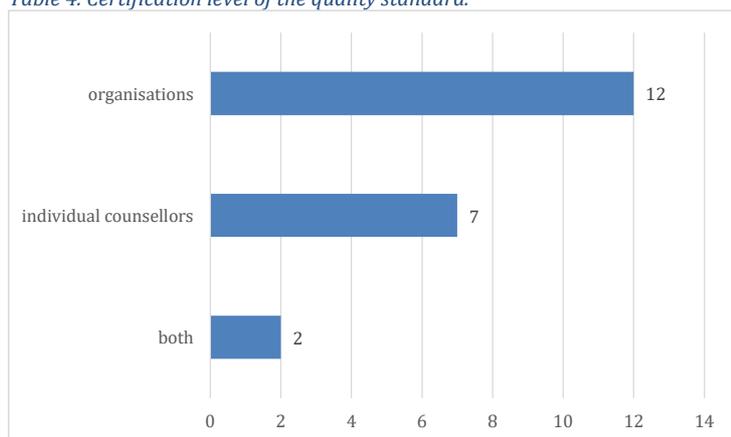
procedure, be part of a holistic quality assurance system. There are six key domains in which quality and the certification procedure may be enacted in the delivery of career guidance:

- **Policy.** Quality assurance can help ensure career guidance is delivered in a consistent manner in line with current policy requirements.
- **Organisation.** Quality assurance can help determine whether provider organisations are designed, resourced and managed in a way that enables quality delivery.
- **Process.** Quality assurance can provide blueprints on the way organisations or individuals can reduce errors in client experience.
- **People.** Quality assurance can ensure compliance that delivery staff adhere to professional standards of the sector.
- **Output or outcome.** Quality assurance can focus on defined and measurable outcomes of clients using the service.
- **Consumption.** Quality assurance can be driven by customer satisfaction of the career guidance service.

Is the standard for individual counsellors and/or organisational/institutional providers

We asked questions to determine whether quality labels in partner countries were labels to quality assure individuals or organisations. Two labels were procedures aimed at certifying features both in the organisational and individual levels (National Career Guidance award - Czech republic & Recommendations for guidance in Schools – Norway). Further, there are nine examples of certification procedures at individual domain (e.g. Qualité Europe Bilan de Compétences – counsellor – France, and BBR BerufsBeratungsRegister (Career guidance Register, Germany). Ten examples are aimed specifically at the organisational level (e.g. Quality in Guidance and Counselling in the field of Education, Career and Employment – Germany, and the Matrix Standard – England). Table 4 details certification levels for each of the quality standards.

Table 4. Certification level of the quality standard.



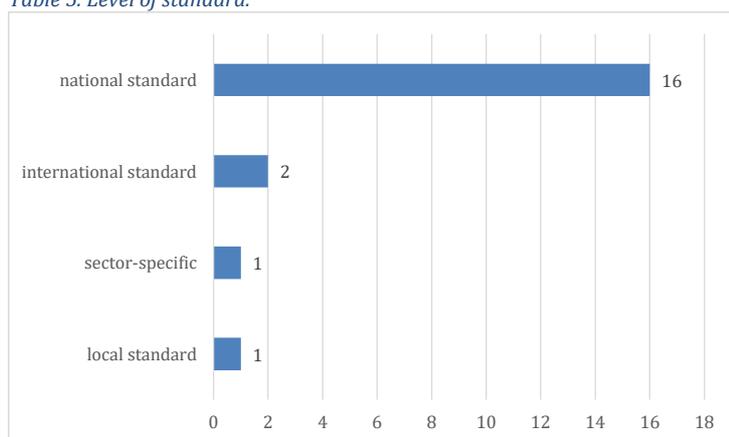
The certification procedures collected in the templates were primarily focussed on quality assurance in the organisation and people domains. This implies that their main focus on one hand is on helping determine whether provider organisations are designed, resourced and managed in a way that enables quality delivery. They also ensure that delivery staff adhere to professional standards of the sector. In five countries (Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Czech Republic and England), there are procedures for certification of both organisational and individual level, but these are different quality labels rather than incorporated into the same label.

**Is the standard awarded nationally, internationally or locally and is it compulsory?**

Most quality labels analysed were voluntary to undertake. Two standards were compulsory. For the Matrix Standard in the UK, all organisations which received public funding must meet the requirements of the standard.

Most quality labels used in partner countries were national standards while some standards were local or sector specific. Two labels used in partner countries were international standards however there seems to be a focus on national standards in partner countries rather than ensuring accreditation with international labels.

*Table 5. Level of standard.*



In appendix 2 we detail each standard, the level at which it accredits and whether it is compulsory.

**Quality development framework for organisations providing guidance**

Quality development in career guidance and counselling implies organisational development. This means that a quality development framework “enables organisations to activate and integrate both the individual perspectives of staff members and the perspective of the organisation to develop and safeguard solutions for assuring or enhancing the quality of guidance, which suit the organisation” (NFB, 2012, p. 9). The quality framework also functions to operationalise national quality assurance standards into the local organisational level. Therefore, a Quality Development Framework supports the quality assurance and enhancement of

guidance service within organisations. Providers of guidance services can use the quality development framework:

- for a systematic introduction of quality development into daily work,
- to improve existing quality approaches with respect to aspects, which are specific for career guidance and counselling,
- to document and communicate their quality development efforts to funders and responsible policy makers (NFB, 2012, p. 8).

The review of national systems through the collected templates show few examples of developed quality development frameworks. This corresponds with another recent review at the European level concluding that quality development frameworks for organisations providing career guidance are currently available in very few countries (Haug, 2018). In the collected examples in this project, the main approach seems to be “preparation systems”, which focus on preparation for concrete accreditation and quality assurance assessments.

In a European context, initiatives have been taken and recommendations have been given on the importance of frameworks designed for the implementation and continuously quality development on an organisational level (ELGPN, 2012; 2015).

In the Netherlands, there has been a consolidation of quality development frameworks to help support the creation of one national standard.

#### **Noloc and CMI joining forces: towards one Dutch national quality framework for career guidance professionals**

With her mission of improving both the quality of career guidance in the Netherlands as well as increasing the number of qualified guidance professionals, in 2011 Noloc implemented her own quality assurance framework for individual career guidance professionals. The ‘Noloc erkend’ quality mark nowadays is one of the two quality marks for individual career guidance professionals in the Netherlands. Some 1,500 career guidance professionals have obtained the Noloc quality mark (July 2018).

Besides the Noloc quality mark for career guidance professionals, the Career Management Institute (CMI) offers an additional quality mark for more experienced career guidance professionals. Some 360 of them have obtained the CMI quality mark ‘Register Loopbaanprofessional’ (July 2018). Noloc has adopted this CMI quality mark as the quality mark for her more senior members.

Agreeing that it would be better if there were one, strong national quality framework for career guidance professionals in the Netherlands, since the end of 2016 Noloc and CMI are in the process of looking for possibilities to join forces. The aim of this process is to develop a national quality standard for individual career guidance professionals on different levels of seniority and specialization.

In April 2018, Noloc and CMI agreed that from July 2020 on, there will be just one Dutch national quality framework for career guidance professionals based on the mutual strengths of both organizations. In order to reach this ambitious goal, it was also agreed that the Noloc and CMI organizations will merge, and the new quality framework will be carried out under the responsibility of Noloc. To guarantee the objectivity of the certification process of individual career professionals willing to obtain the new national quality mark – either Noloc member or not – a number of safety valves will be implemented.

Another recent national example in these matters (not included in the templates) is Ireland's example of 'A Whole School Guidance Framework' (NCGE, 2017). It is intended to be a resource for schools to support the planning, design and delivery of the whole school guidance programme in line with the requirements of The Education Act that schools provide students with "access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices" (section 9c). Here the recommended role for the quality development framework to support and complement national legislation/quality standards is exemplified (ELGPN, 2012).

A continuum of support model for the school guidance programme, similar to the school support model of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), is presented in the framework – guidance for all, guidance for some and guidance for a few. The continuum comprises a whole school approach to guidance through guidance-related learning to individual support for students. The framework identifies three areas of learning to facilitate students' development in eight areas of competence. The areas of learning include: learning related to oneself (personal/social development), educational opportunities (educational development) and career decision making (career development).

In the Norwegian context, work is underway with Skills Norway as the leading partner to establish a national quality framework based on an understanding that all involved parties have a different role to play in a comprehensive lifelong guidance system. This includes: quality standards for practitioners - what skills are needed? (*process*); a Framework for Career Management Skills – individual learning goals for guidance (*output*); Ethical standards and guidelines (*process*); and Quality Indicators/ Benchmarks/Data Gathering (*output*). Norway is also developing a web-based guidance service (Skills Norway, 2018).

There are Erasmus + projects relevant to these matters. One example is the MyFuture Erasmus + project. One of the outputs consisted of a handbook for school managers, teachers, decision makers and stakeholders in the field of education and career services (Sultana, 2018). The handbook presents a Quality Framework for career guidance which aims at helping schools and career guidance providers improve the quality of their services for students. In their handbook, they argue that "the quality of career guidance products and services can improve if we pay attention to

- our career learning programmes,
- the career information made available,
- the personalised support offered through career counselling ,
- the provision of a well-organised and accessible career resource hub ,

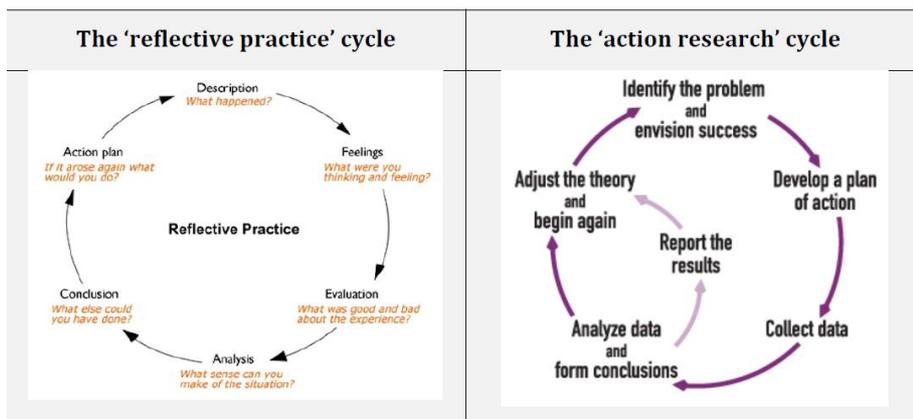
- the development of partnership input in career education and
- the formation of reflective practitioners who make the attainment of high standards a goal.

The handbook is based on different procedural principles of the ongoing development of quality which include their understanding of what quality and quality assurance is informed by:

- a trust in the competence and good will of professionals ,
- valuing the student voice,
- Focusing on fitness for purpose and
- Enhancing quality through action research and adoption of the reflective.

If 'reflective practice' is the hallmark of quality, then 'participative action research' is the corresponding hallmark of quality assurance (Sultana, 2018). The two notions are linked in philosophy and approach and both acknowledge the professional's competence in awareness of situations, critical analysis and the strategic renewal of action and systems in relation to sought after outcomes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Reflective practice and action research cycles.



#### Audit/labelling procedure for organisational providers of career guidance

There are a variety of ways in which quality standards audit organisational practice.

Audits usually focus on three areas:

- organisational structure,
- organisational process and
- organisational outcomes.

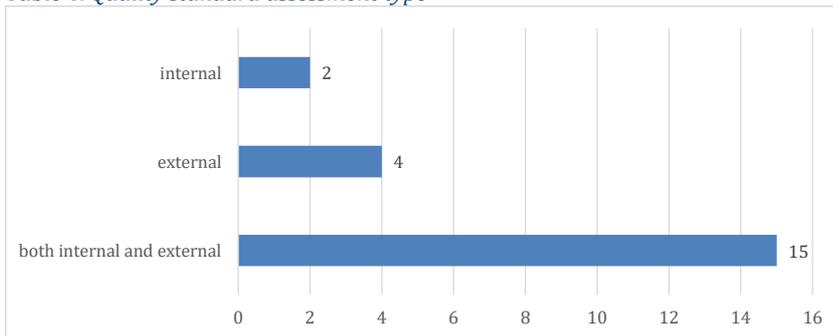
Audits can sit on a continuum of formality where audits can be internal only or assessed by an outside accrediting body through a series of external professional visits.

### Types of assessments

Many quality labels submitted completed information about their audit and labelling approach. Most (71%) standards used a mix of both internal and external assessment types (see table 6). BeQu a quality standard in German has an innovative audit approach some of which was described earlier. BeQu was one of two standards that use an internal assessment approach only. Their approach is a participative process of assessment. The organisation management alongside practitioner staff decide on both their assessment indicators based upon their priority quality development areas. They then complete an open process of coordination with a large group of stakeholders which includes experts, practitioners, policymakers as well as nfb and university staff.

The most common type of auditing procedure was a mixture of both internal and external audits. This typically involves completing an in-house assessment against the quality label criteria prior to external assessment. In some instances, internal assessments were also taken into consideration during decisionmaking.

*Table 6. Quality standard assessment type*



### Resources to guide the audit

Most quality assurance standards had bespoke resources to guide individuals or organisations through the audit process. One quarter (25%) of quality standards audited offered more than one resource to support the auditing process. Five templates did not provide information on resources available to support individuals or organisations through the quality standard accreditation process.

The most common resources provided to support the accreditation process was guidance documents (35%) followed by workshops (20%). Table 8 below lists the variety of resources mentioned and the frequency in which they were mentioned. Resources such as mentoring, self-assessment tools and advisors, case studies of practice, webinars, telephone and email support, and one days consultancy were provided less often.

*Table 7. Resources listed to support quality standard process.*

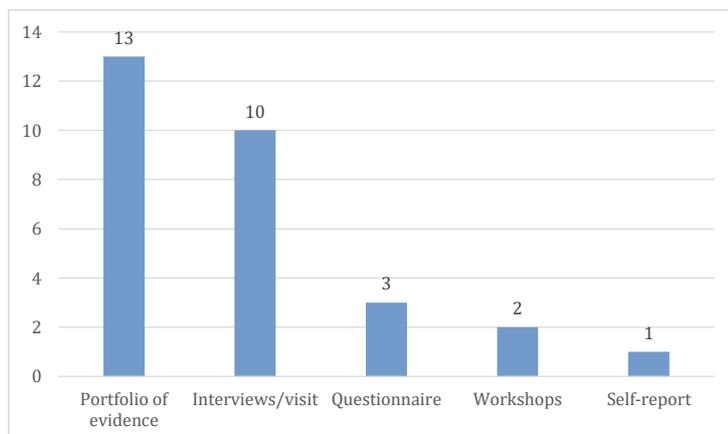
Resource Type	Frequency Mentioned
---------------	---------------------

<b>Guidance Documents/Checklists</b>	7
<b>Workshops</b>	4
<b>Mentoring</b>	3
<b>Self assessment tool/online portfolio</b>	2
<b>Advisor/supervision</b>	2
<b>Case studies</b>	1
<b>Webinars</b>	1
<b>Telephone/email support</b>	1
<b>One day Consultancy</b>	1
<b>Preparation courses</b>	1

#### Audit tools

Nineteen (19) templates recorded relevant assessment tools use during the audit. Of the nineteen, 63% used more than one type of assessment to make a decision whether to award the quality standard. Most quality standards (68%) used a portfolio of evidence to make decisions about whether or not an organisation or an individual met the criteria of the quality standard. Seventy-seven percent (77% or 10 out of 13) of quality awards that required portfolios of evidence used them in conjunction with other assessment methods.

Table 8. Audit methods.



#### A case study of auditing practice

FECBOP – Fédération Européenne des Centres de Bilan et d’Orientation Professionnelle / European Federation of Centres of Career Guidance and Bilan de Competences

A specific quality standard and quality assurance procedure were developed by the European network of career guidance providers influenced by the “bilan de compétences” (skills audit) methodology with some 100 members in 10 European countries. The quality standard contains 11 criteria and is delivered by the European Labelling Committee

that is an elected body within FECBOP with 5 members (currently 1 from France, 2 from Italy, 1 from Belgium, 1 from Czech republic).

The quality assurance process is as follows:

1. The organization sends the candidature sheet to the FECBOP Executive Bureau of the Federation. This sheet contains basic information about the candidate (activities, statistical data, motivation for obtaining the label).
2. The Executive Bureau assigns the auditor: three auditors are currently working for FECBOP, trained by the French network of skills audit centres. The auditor sends the candidate the necessary documents (Audit agreement, guide for internal audit and requirements for the agenda of the audit visit. An internal audit guide allows the organization to prepare for the audit visit, collect all necessary evidence and send it beforehand to the auditor.
3. The auditor agrees with the candidate organization on the time schedule (date of the visit, deadline for submission of internal audit guide, foreseen date of the meeting of the meeting of European Labelling Committee (1-3 months after the audit)
4. The audit takes 2 days and contains meeting with an official representative, consultation of documents (final reports from bilan de competences, competence portfolios), consultation of the library of methods, meeting with a group of beneficiaries and with a group of counsellors.
5. The auditor prepares the audit report within 15 days after the audit. A draft of the audit report is sent to candidate for eventual comments and corrections (if necessary) and then submitted to the European Labelling Committee.
6. The European Labelling Committee meets and decides about awarding the quality label (usually 1-3 months after the audit). The auditor presents the report and additional questions can be asked by the committee members to the candidate during the meeting.

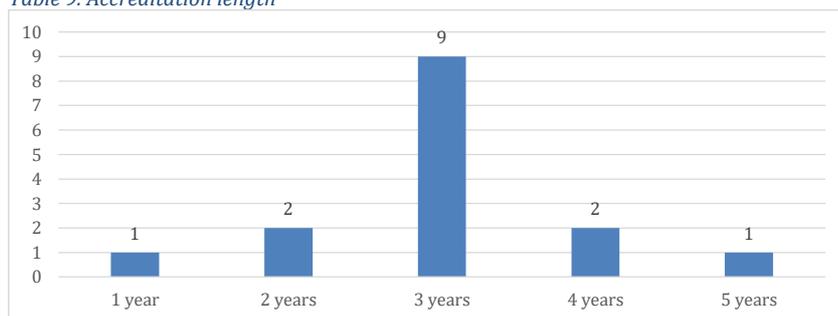
Currently, 25 centres in 8 countries successfully obtained the quality label and 5 – 7 audits are realized every year by FECBOP auditors. The audit is realized every 5 years.

#### Accreditation length

Once an organisation is accredited with a quality assurance standard it lasts approximately three years on average (see table 9). Depending on the standard there may be periodic checks throughout the accreditation life. For example the Matrix Standard conducts continuous improvement checks at 12 and 24 months within the accreditation cycle. These checks are conducted remotely between the organisation and its assessor. A self reflection tool is sent to organisations detailing

the areas for continuous improvement identified in the initial assessment. The organisation sends in evidence that it is working on the areas identified. This is discussed in a telephone interview facilitated by the assessor. After this process the assessor makes a decision upon the evidence provided in a manner similar to the initial assessment.

Table 9. Accreditation length



## Discussion

At the outset of the project many questions were articulated to help guide project outputs. This section will attempt answer these questions through the data while also suggesting where more evidence is needed.

***What is the real usage and spread of different trans-national quality standards and referentials for individual counsellors (European Career Guidance Certificates, NICE etc.) and for institutional providers of career guidances (e.g Quality Label “Bilan de compétences”) What is the real impact of these standards for the professionalization of career guidance provision?***

The data suggests that in partner countries there is a priority for national quality labels with very little engagement with transnational quality labels. This includes both quality assurance at both the organisational and individual level. Career guidance still seems to be driven largely through national policy agendas and those agendas may be fragmented within partner countries.

From the from ELGPN (2015) recommendations, we see several potential areas for improvement in the development of quality assurance standards. One of their recommendations concerns the need for clear professional standards established for guidance practitioners working in a variety of different roles in different sectors. They suggest that continuing improvement of the design and implementation of guidance services and of guidance tools and products should be promoted through client involvement and through the application of entitlements. In the collected templates, the German example (BeQu) stands out as the most comprehensive system.

***How are different quality assurance approaches (focused on policy, organization, process, people, outputs/outcomes, consumption), used in selected european and non-european countries?***

The certification procedures collected in the templates were primarily in connection with the organisation and people domains of Hooley and Rice (2018) six domain typology. This implies that their focus on one hand is on helping determine whether provider organisations are designed, resourced and managed in a way that enables quality delivery. Further, on ensuring compliance that delivery staff adhere to professional standards of the sector. In five countries (Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Czech Republic and England), there are procedures for certification of both organisational and individual level, but these are not incorporated in the same standard/concept. As seen in the example from England, quality assurance can provide blueprints on the way organisations or individuals can reduce errors in client experience and therefore be seen as covering the process domain.

***How are different guidelines for career guidance strategies and policies implemented in different countries? What are the main challenges and how are they dealt with in different countries?***

Most quality labels submitted from the partner countries were advisory. In the UK, matrix Standard approves providers of career guidance that receive government funding for their services. This is to ensure that the policy is delivered consistently across providers. For most other partner countries there is no regulatory system requiring specific quality labels.

***What best practices can be found that illustrate the main approaches in quality assurance in career guidance?***

This report highlights several areas of practice that are useful to illustrate approaches to quality assurance. In the Netherlands, CMI offer mentoring to enable achievement in the quality label. In Germany BeQu engages providers with a participatory approach to auditing.

*Content analysis of quality standards: What are the main quality areas in quality standards for career guidance counsellors and for organizational providers of career guidance?*

***Analysis of the relative weight of different components of quality standards: Which content elements/quality areas are key for the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance? Which ones are the most “difficult” to observe for individual counsellors and organizations?***

The templates were quite clear that certain components were not more or less important to achieving the quality label. Each of them must be met and be given equal importance.

Most templates noted that providers had difficulty articulating how the competencies were met. This does not mean they cannot meet or even observe these competencies but that the process defined by the label may cause providers difficulty. For most labels submitted the audit process requires a written portfolio of evidence. This assessment type may be one cause of problems for providers. Although written evidence is the assessment method it is often not what is being

Kommentiert [O1]: Almost finished with this analysis. Apologies for it not being in sooner.

assessed. More work could be done to ensure this assessment type does not create barriers to successful accreditation.

***What mechanisms are used to foster the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance for individual counsellors and organizations (e.g. mentoring)?***

Regulatory approaches are used within the UK adult guidance sector to ensure quality. For most other labels, it is the acknowledgement of the label as a standard of quality both to those within the sector and external stakeholders that encourage providers to take up the label.

In terms of practical resources most labels provide guidance documents to providers wishing to pursue or adhere to the label. Some labels provide workshops (four labels). Other forms of support (e.g. webinars, telephone support, mentoring) are available to some. Consistent support with a variety of modes of support are only available to a few labels submitted.

***What specific policy recommendations can be inferred from these findings?***

The findings revealed strengths and fields of improvement for quality assurance processes. Seventeen audit templates provided a list of challenges to implementing their quality standard. There were a variety of challenges listed. These challenges were coded thematically into three broad themes:

- Successful completion of audit and documentation.
  - articulating how competencies are met,
  - ensuring documentation and all components are completed,
- Improving motivation and interest by individuals and organisations in the quality standard.
  - formalizing the certification
- Improving services
  - increasing client satisfaction.

There are policy recommendations that can help overcome these barriers. This could include providing multiple modes of support to complete the audit, particularly if the audit includes developing a portfolio of evidence. Policy can also determine the value of particular labels. For many partner countries quality labels are voluntary. If labels are part of the policy on career guidance then it could help increase motivation and interest on the part of providers. In order to improve services labels which adopt a continuous development approach should be prioritised by policy to embed a consistent cycle of improvement for providers.

## Conclusion

The notion of quality is a contested and complex concept. It appears in different levels or domains of policy (Hooley and Rice, 2018). Different national approaches are informed both by the national context and current policy initiatives. When trying to summarise some general recommendations, it is useful to include the reflections from the German partner NfB which aligns with our interpretations of the data.

In the first partner meeting, Karen Schober from Germany held a presentation. Based on her experience from the German context, she concluded with the following difficulties and pitfalls with quality assurance processes:

- Challenges to implement a **cross-sector-approach** throughout education (school and adult) and employment,
- **Little backing from governments** and little willingness to provide funding for the implementation process,
- **Hesitation by provider organisations and professional associations** who hold up their own sectoral standards and/or certificates,
- **Competition of credentials** and
- **Limited financial and personal resources** of those providers who have a strong interest in implementing the QDF-process and the standards in their organisation.

These national difficulties, combined with experience from other countries led her to the following summary and recommendations:

- Quality development in career guidance in many European countries has been largely influenced, promoted and supported by international and **European activities**.
- Quality development in career guidance has become a **policy issue** in achieving important social and economic policy goals.
- Quality in career guidance does not only depend on the qualification and competences of guidance practitioners. It is likewise the **responsibility of service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders** involved in guidance provision as well as clients and users, which have to be addressed equally.
- The definition and development of quality goals and criteria require a common understanding of the issue among the relevant actors and stakeholders – it is a **negotiating process**.
- **Strong professional associations** play an important role in the development of professional standards for career guidance.
- Developing (new) quality standards or guidelines needs to be **connected** to existing quality concepts and credentials
- Scrutinizing the **compatibility** of different quality development systems and acknowledging them as compatible standards/ guidelines if appropriate
- Aiming for legislative or **mandatory solutions**, since government funding usually does not guarantee sustainable quality development
- The termination of most of the project or programme funded guidance provision inhibits sustainable development of quality and professionalism in career guidance. **Quality needs continuity** and security to grow and sustain.
- A **return** from short term project funded guidance provision to legally grounded service provision by regular **public institutions who have a legal mandate** for career guidance seems to be necessary.

## References

- Allen, T.D., Finkelstein, L.M., and Poteet, M.L. (2009). *Designing Workplace Mentoring Programs: An Evidence-Based Approach*. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing.
- European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). (2012). Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit. Jyväskylä. ELGPN. Hentet fra: <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-tools-no1-resource-kit>.
- ELGPN. (2015). Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance. A Reference Framework for the EU and for the Commission. Jyväskylä: ELGPN.
- Haug, E.H. (2018). Nasjonalt kvalitetsrammeverk for karriereveiledning – en kunnskapsoversikt. [National quality framework for career guidance – a systematic knowledge review]. Skills Norway report. Retrieved from: <https://www.kompetansenorge.no/Karriereveiledning/kvalitet-i-karriereveiledning/> (In Norwegian).
- Hooley, T. and Rice, S. (2018). Ensuring quality in career guidance: a critical review. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, DOI: [10.1080/03069885.2018.1480012](https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2018.1480012)
- Karcher, M.J., Kuperminc, G.P., Portwood, S.G, Sipe, C.L., and Taylor, A.S. (2006). Mentoring programs: a framework to inform program development, research, and evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(6): 709-725.
- NCGE (2017). A Whole School Guidance Framework. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework>
- NFB/RESEARCH GROUP QUALITY IN GUIDANCE AT THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCE OF THE RUPRECHT-KARLS-UNIVERSITY, HEIDELBERG (Eds.) (2012), Quality and professionalism in career guidance and counselling – The open process of coordination for quality development in career guidance in German (2009 - 2012). English Short Version of main results, Berlin/Heidelberg.
- Skills Norway (2018). Bakgrunn for utviklingsprosjekt. [Background document – national quality framework for career guidance]. Retrieved from: <https://www.kompetansenorge.no/globalassets/karriere/bakgrunn-kvalitetsrammeverk.pdf> (In Norwegian)
- Sultana, R. (2018). Enhancing the quality of career guidance in secondary schools... a Handbook. MyFuture Erasmus + project output. Retrieved from: <https://myfutureproject.eu/resources/>.

## Appendix 1. Audit template.

This template was created as a data collection tool to inform the analytical paper on quality assurance practices in career guidance across Europe. The analytical paper will inform the development of the additional outcomes of the project including the quality development framework, mentoring program, certification procedure and auditing and labelling procedure.

For the purpose of this template we will use the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) adopted definitions to guide our work on quality assurance systems.

**Quality assurance** are activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that guidance activities (content of programmes, design, assessment and validation of outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders

**Quality standards** are the standard(s) that an organisation sets for all of its key business operations and that help clarify what an organisation expects of its employees in delivering these operations or a client can expect when using the service. They can refer to the systems and procedures developed by career practitioners and stakeholders in the career sector that:

- define the career sector, its membership and its services;
- recognise the diverse skills and knowledge of career practitioners;
- guide practitioner entry into the sector;
- provide a foundation for designing career practitioner training;
- provide quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders in the sector;
- create an agreed terminology for the sector.

Please complete a form **for each quality standard in career guidance** recognised in your country. If the standard is for both individuals and organisations, please fill in one for each procedure.

1. Quality standard Name:

2. Is this standard for:

- individual counsellors
- organisational/institutional providers

3. Is the standard awarded nationally, internationally or locally?

- International standard
- National standard
- local standard

4. Is this standard compulsory for providers of career guidance?

yes

no

5. How many individuals or organisations have this quality standard?  
(Approximate if necessary)

6. What are the target groups (end users) for this quality standard?

young people (18 and under)

adults (19 and over)

individuals with special educational needs

other (please specify)

7. What is the main function of this quality standard to support the achievements of goals and objectives? (For example, to support public spending, service efficiency, ensure client satisfaction). Please list and describe.

**03: Certification procedure for career guidance professionals and 04: Quality development framework for organisations providing guidance**

8. What organisation manages the quality standard?

9. Does this quality standard use internal assessment, external assessment or a mix of both?

internal assessment only

external assessment only

both internal assessment and external assessment

10. If the quality standard uses internal assessment procedures, what types of internal assessment are in place?

self-assessment

assessment by colleagues

supervision by management

11. Please list any additional details about the type of assessment used by the quality standard.

12. What are the main assessment indicators of quality for this standard? *(Please attach any supporting documents about the standard)*

**05: Audit/labelling procedure for organisational providers of career guidance**

13. What are the main assessment tools for this quality standard?

14. What is the auditing cycle for the quality standard?

15. How long are organisations or individuals accredited with the quality standard?

16. How frequently are individuals or organisations assessed?

17. What is the price of the assessment (in Euro)?

18. What is the typical recertification procedure for the standard?

19. In what ways does recertification differ from the initial certification of the quality award?

**02: Mentoring programme for career guidance practitioner.**

20. Do individuals or organisations generally adhere to the processes of the quality standard?

- Always
- Mostly
- Rarely
- Never

21. What are the most challenging aspects of the quality standard to implement?

22. What assessment indicators of the quality standard are considered the most important to implement by individuals and organisations obtaining the quality award?

23. What assessment indicators of the quality standard are considered the most important to implement by the organisation that manages the quality standard?

24. What types of resources are used to ensure successful implementation of the quality standard (e.g. mentoring programme or guidance documents)? *(If possible please attach or link to these resources after describing them)*

25. In what ways does this standard contribute to the standard of the career guidance profession in your country?

26. How does achieving this quality standard effect the reputation of career guidance professionals outside the profession?

27. What is the motivation for individuals or organisations to achieve the quality standard?

28. What support/funding is available to organisations to implement the quality standard?

Appendix 2. Standards submitted, at what level they accredit and whether they are compulsory.

Name of standard	Standard level	Compulsory standard?
National Career Guidance award - Czech republic	National	No
National register of qualifications - Czech Republic	National	No
Qualité Europe Bilan de Compétences - counsellor	International	No
IMPROVE – project Improving Validation of Non-Formal Learning in European Career Guidance Practitioners - Czech republic	Draft (project) usable on international, national and local level.	No
Noloc Erkend Loopbaanprofessional (Noloc Acknowledged Career Professional) (Netherland)	National	No
Register Loopbaanprofessional / Registered Career Guidance Professional (Netherlands)	National	No
OVAL Kwaliteitseisen (OVAL quality standards) Netherlands	National	No
Blik op Werk Keurmerk (Blik op Werk Quality standard) - Netherlands	International + National	
Quality standard of the National Federation of CIBCs (Interinstitutional Centres of Bilan de Compétences) – Qualité Totale CIBC - France	National	Yes
External quality insurance for vendor indifferent vocational counselling in Austria	National	No
Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA) certificate “Certified Adult Educator”/WBA diploma “Graduate Adult	National	No

Educator (with focus on counselling)" - Austria		
European Career Guidance Certificate (ECGC), e.g. academic degrees Academic Expert and Master of Arts (MA) in Educational and Vocational Guidance	National	No
Matrix Standard - England	National	yes – for those that receive government funding
Quality in Careers Standard – England	National	No
BBR- BerufsBeratungsRegister (Career guidance Register, Germany)	National	No
KQB – Kundenorientierte Qualitätstestierung für Beratungsorganisationen - Germany	National (special needs)	No
"QBM - Quality frame Berliner Modell" based on the "Quality concept for guidance" from k.o.s GmbH - Germany	Local	No
Certified provider of educational guidance and counselling" – Quality Standards for the certification of educational guidance providers	National/local/sector specific (adult)	No
Quality Standards for Guidance Practitioners in the Area of Education, Career and Employment	National/local/sector specific (adult)	No
BeQu-Standard (Beratungsqualitaet in Bildung, Beruf und Beschaeftigung/ Quality in Guidance and Counselling in the field of Education, Career and Employment	National	Yes, in one federal state
Recommendations for guidance in Schools (secondary and upper secondary)	national, sector specific	No