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RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTING SELF-EVALUATION

Quality Identification and Assurance in VET

Who and what is the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training

The National Institute for Vocational Education and Training is the central development and advisory institution for VET in Slovenia. The basic tasks of the Institute include creation of professional bases and methodogy platforms, competence-based occupational standards, development of contemporary modular educational programmes and other activities leading to increased quality of VET and integration of education and work sphere.

1 SELF-EVALUATION AS A METHOD OF QUALITY IDENTIFICATION AND ASSURANCE IN VET

The new Vocational Education and Training Act (Official Gazette, 79/2006) lays down a new framework for the functioning and development of the VET system in Slovenia. On the one hand, the legislator reinforced the autonomy and development role of schools with the result that decision-making power has shifted increasingly to providers at local level; while on the other hand, it reinforced the significance of quality identification and assurance at all levels, mostly at a level of education providers. For instance, Article 16 obliges providers to set up a Quality Assurance Commission and publish its annual report at their respective websites.

Providers of VET programmes are increasingly subject to more and more requirements in terms of responding to rapid changes in society and the economy. In order to be as efficient as possible, they make full use of state-of-the-art technology. What is more, they address the needs of various users and exchange experience in respective partnership networks. They strive to be recognisable and competitive, both locally and nationally. Pursuing an active partnership with social partners in their local environment, with other providers in their region or within a wide professional area, with national and developmental institutions as well as with schools and faculties, providers have to demonstrate reliable and transparent action. One prerequisite for this is definitely quality identification, assurance and development of educational work.

Providers guarantee quality according to principles of the comprehensive quality management system taking into consideration the Common European Framework on Quality Assurance in VET (Article 15 of the Vocational Education and Training Act). The framework has been grounded on existing experience and knowledge of EU Member States, and on the analyses of examples of "good practice". The Common European Framework on Quality Assurance in VET provides a simple, but efficient framework for introducing continuous improvement processes. It has been designed to help the Member States develop, improve, monitor and evaluate their systems and practices supported by a common reference system and specific reference tools. Feedback has a crucial role in examining common framework's references (indicators and quality criteria) with the aim of improving its European added value. The Common European Framework's recommended method for quality identification and assurance is self-evaluation *(work by quality assurance group, 2005, 15).*

Self-evaluation that has been developing into an important factor in education is best planned and organised as a learning process. Self-evaluation provides a way to improve the functioning of an organisation and to set priority areas for development, as well as providing a fundamental insight into all school activities. What is more, self-evaluation is a process aimed at improving training quality. Its purpose is to obtain information on the functioning of a school. This information serves as a basis for planning improvements to be made to the functioning of an institution and its personnel, while avoiding targeting scapegoats. As well, self-evaluation helps schools analyse their activities, and provides appropriate

feedback concerning those areas that should be changed. It is, however, of utmost importance that schools plan and carry out measures based on their findings.

Self-evaluation:

- >> provides a systematic and comprehensive insight into all school activities,
- >> sets priority areas for improvements,
- >> provides continuity (evaluation is part and parcel of planning and functioning),
- >> increases performance,
- >> provides discretion of results,
- >> helps school adjust to the requirements of the local environment).

Evaluation is viable at school in a series of areas ranging from student's learning, teaching, professional development of teachers and other colleagues to school organisation and management... It could also focus on classroom activities or on school management. Self-evaluation can be useful for various target groups (we can take into consideration ourselves, all personnel, colleagues etc.). Further emphasis will be placed on self-evaluation at a level of organisation (institution, school) as well as at a level of individual teachers.

PURPOSE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to quality identification and assurance, there are already a number of tools, instruments and projects in place (e.g. the Blue Eye, the Mirror, Quality Network, POKI, QUTE, to name just a few). It goes without saying that recommendations for self-evaluation implementation do not replace instruments developed and used by schools; rather they serve as guidelines used for applying existing instruments and devising new ones.

What is more, recommendations are used to define key areas of VET and provide guidelines for improving their quality. Recommendations are structured in an open fashion and will mostly help schools in their development and that of school processes. Similarly, these recommendations provide a common starting point for formulating quality concepts while accounting for school practices and experiences.

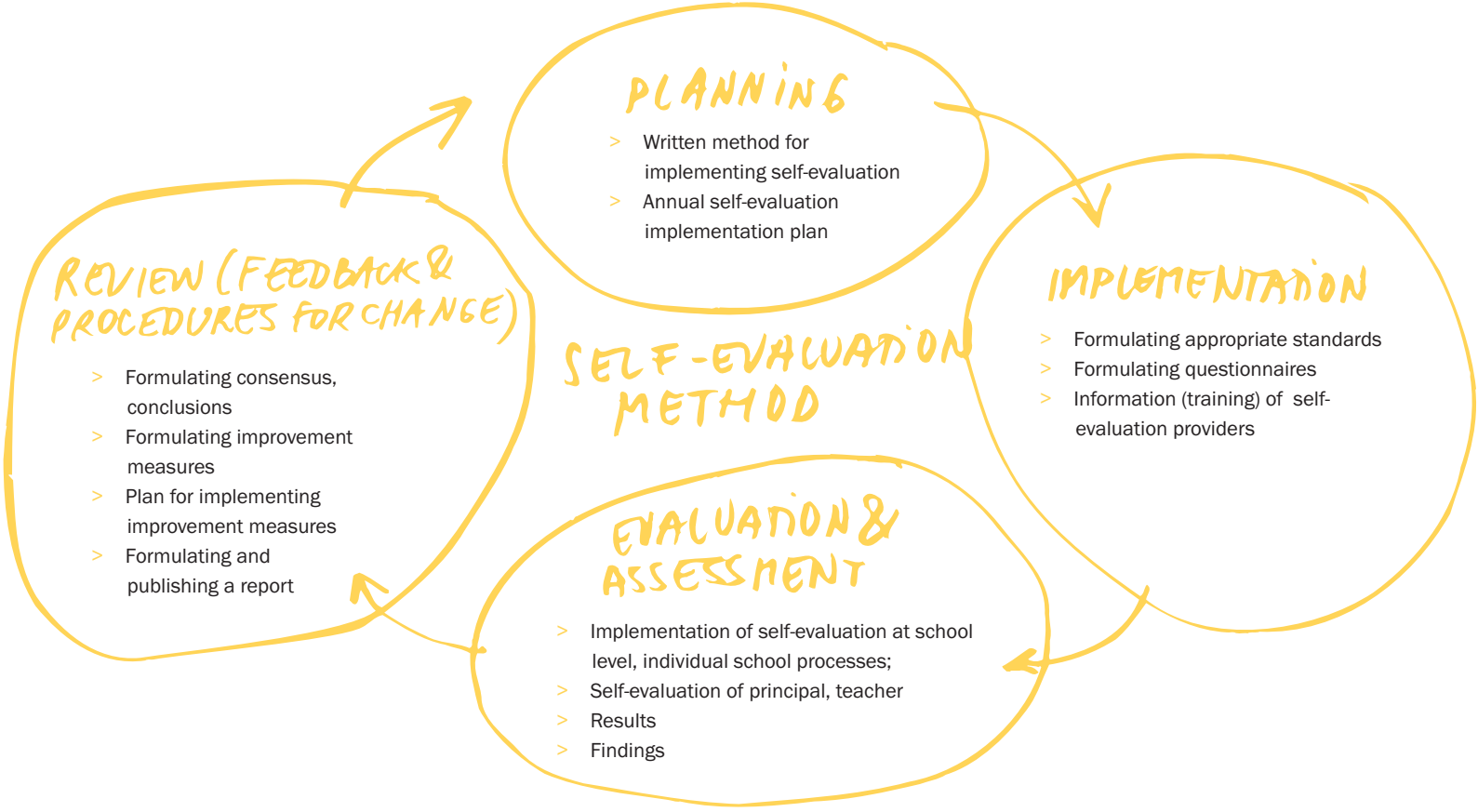
IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF-EVALUATION AT SCHOOL

Implementation of self-evaluation at school is placed into a framework of the comprehensive quality management system. As is the case with every school process, self-evaluation has to be registered in such a way to commit the school management and personnel to regularly implementing it as well as taking into consideration resultant findings in their subsequent work. School are in accordance with the Vocational Education and Training Act liable to:

- >> develop quality according to principles of the comprehensive quality management system,
- >> set up a quality assurance commission,
- >> annually publish the quality assurance report at their respective websites.

Setting up the comprehensive quality management system is a highly demanding and time consuming process. It is recommended that the quality assurance commission formulates the entire programme progressively, and in so doing, take into consideration the recommendation provided in this text and other development projects. By implementing the recommended self-evaluation methodology, the quality assurance commission will encourage all personnel to monitor and evaluate their own performance in a planned manner. The quality assurance commission plans in these efforts to progressively engage various actors, appropriately register procedures applied, encourage the school management to participate in those projects that support self-evaluation development. What is more, it would also encourage the school management to join the school networks aimed at developing quality, and sometimes invite external experts and institutions to participate in evaluation.

The evaluation process at school may be illustrated with the following quality assurance cycle.



Prerequisites for successful self-evaluation are as follows:

> >> Defined mission, vision and values of a school providing answers to the following 2 questions: "Why are we in place?" "What are our objectives?" These answers provide a foundation for planning a school self-evaluation process.
> >> Participation of the school management that plays an active role and has a clear interest is significant to the success of self-evaluation. The school management has to be fully and evidently engaged in self-evaluation.
> >> Autonomy of a school and teacher (school and teachers alone are most responsible for high-quality performance).
> >> Dialogue is a crucial prerequisite for self-evaluation, and it could also be one of several successful results of self-evaluation process. Dialogue results in an open and honest working environment able to embrace diversity and respect other colleague's work. The principal runs his/her school according to the participative management principles.
> >> certificates (achievements at matura exam, minutes, journals, official results of various contests ...) provide a basis for decisions. The following statement: "It is said that we teach well!" may only be acceptable if it is supported by all appropriate documentation – evaluated results of surveys, analysis of school logbooks... If such documentation is missing, then their acquisition means a priority area for improvement.

(An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET-providers, 2003, 12–14)

The following should be born in mind:

> >> Self-evaluation is a long-term process that does not always yield results immediately and it implies the beginning of a long-term development strategy;
> >> Self-evaluation requires a continuous development of the organisation system, data and certificate collection methods;
> >> It is significant to select priority areas of self-evaluation for specific periods (e.g. school year);
> >> It is important to formulate a list of activities (action plan);
> >> Self-evaluation requires enduring and continuous work of all participants;
> >> Self-evaluation is learning from one's own experiences, and it increases responsibility for one's own success and development.

What is more, it is also recommendable that the school management first tests self-evaluation itself. Provided that the test is successful, then members of the quality assurance group and others undertake self-evaluation as well.

This is a list of challenges facing schools when introducing self-evaluation:

> >> Creating interest for self-evaluation;
> >> Understanding the significance of self-evaluation;
> >> Developing strategies for certificate collection;
> >> Using self-evaluation results (a change in their approach to work);
> >> Reporting on self-evaluation results;
> >> Deciding on how to present results;
> >> Confronting exposure that results from self-evaluation;
> >> Confronting resistance by individuals;
> >> Embracing the idea that also other training participants may evaluate teachers and their performance;
> >> Developing understanding that self-evaluation is a "natural and ongoing process";
> >> Incorporation of self-evaluation in the school's annual work plan.

(I-Probenet; Comenius 3 Network on Self-Evaluation: Let Us Create a Mirror for Our Own School, Sibia 2002, Brdo 2003, Graz 2004)

AREAS OF SELF-EVALUATION

Please find attached the defined areas that schools cover in self-evaluation:

1. School management
2. Quality assurance system
3. Educational process planning
4. Learning and teaching
5. Testing and assessment
6. Meeting educational objectives
7. Work-based practical training
8. Counselling and support to students
9. Professional development of teachers and other practitioners
10. School as the centre of life-long learning
11. Development projects

Each area has defined quality indicators, guidelines for improving quality and a basic quality level. The guidelines for improving quality define optimal objectives that schools should strive to attain, while the basic quality level should be regarded as the lowest level that schools need to achieve without compromising their quality. What is more, self-evaluation should serve schools to formulate an assessment for quality attainment and improvement measures concerning all abovementioned areas. We recommend that in the course of the 1st year self-evaluation takes place in two to three areas. The quality assurance commission at school should progressively incorporate into self-evaluation increasingly more areas. The Professional Council of the Republic of Slovenia for VET shall determine mandatory areas and indicators that each school will have to cover in its quality assurance report.

SELF-EVALUATION OF TEACHERS

The teacher is placed at the heart of training quality development as he/she creates an appropriate learning environment and makes his/her utmost to continuously improve it. What is more, the teacher systematically monitors progress made by training participants while providing them with support when they encounter difficulties. Therefore, the teacher needs a realistic insight into his/her work as well as a critical attitude towards it. Objective self-evaluation is a demanding task but it has to be conducted.

Each teacher should frequently ask him/herself about ways to improve his/her work, and on the basis of self-evaluation reflect on his/her teaching, approach to training participants and other things. In doing so, the following questions should be considered: “What changes can I make in my work, in my class, schools, with professional colleagues, with the head teacher and my engagement with parents? What kind of school makes me feel good?” Besides self-evaluation, it is crucial that the teacher receives feedback form training participants. The teacher should evaluate the assessments provided by training participants and should discuss the results with them.

It is also important that the teacher should feel responsible for training results as well as for implementing appropriate measures aimed at enhancing training. The self-complacency on the part of the teacher is a cause for many problems when it comes to providing quality of training.

(An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET-providers, 2003, 12–14)

PREPARING & ORGANISING SELF-EVALUATION

The quality assurance commission is an initiator and coordinator of self-evaluation activities. The annual self-evaluation plan defines areas, timeframe and responsibilities for implementing self-evaluation. When deciding on appropriate areas, the commission takes into account the principle of gradual approach whereby it should meet the requirements of various stakeholders (the school council, ministry, parents, students etc). Recommended indicators with described guidelines are used as evaluation criteria. It is also desirable that schools formulate their own indicators with their own objectives and criteria. When devising questionnaires, the commission shall add to individual areas and indicators some additional questions to help it formulate individual assessments and collect evidence for them. The commission in charge of implementing self-evaluation should be composed of the representatives of various school groups.

When it comes to teacher self-evaluation, the commission shall select and formulate appropriate questionnaires as well as providing electronic support for implementing teacher self-evaluation. In doing so, it can avail itself of existing tools.

SELF-EVALUATION MEETINGS

The quality assurance commission makes sure that the timeframe for self-evaluation has been carefully chosen. It is highly likely that self-evaluation will take place in the second half of the year, however, it should not be conducted too late (including planning of improvement measures and report publication) in order for the entire process to come to an end prior to the conclusion of the school year. Of course it goes without saying that individual self-evaluation activities take place throughout the year. The commission in charge of implementing self-evaluation should be appropriately familiarised with all abovementioned areas and indicators. It is crucial that each individual participant first makes his/her own assessment, and the commission produces a joint assessment based on these individual ones. Each assessment should be based on appropriate evidence. The commission should formulate a common position regarding positive aspects, strengths of each area, and should together identify activities that need improvement.

Similarly, we recommend that when it comes to implementing self-evaluation, both by individual teachers and principals, 2 groups should be engaged in this process, with each group assessing the situation from their own perspective. This means that the teacher should put the same questions that he/she has considered to pupils as well. The principal, on the other hand, should invite into “the second group” teachers, other personnel, as well as pupils and their parents. When implementing self-evaluation at school level, 2 groups could also be formulated, with the first group featuring the representatives of the school management and teachers, while the second group includes the representatives of pupils and other users.

It is crucial that the results and views of all groups engaged are reflected in the final assessment.

FORMULATING IMPROVEMENT MEASURES AND REPORTS

The quality assurance commission organises a wide discussion on evaluation results at school. Based on these findings, responsible persons or groups devise measures and activities that will result in improvements. The quality assurance commission appropriately describes self-evaluation procedure and results in its report, with special emphasis on findings and planned improvement measures.

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AREAS AND INDICATORS FOR IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

AREA 1: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
1. Mission, vision and school values	> The school management takes into account its enshrined mission and vision while carrying out its day-to-day tasks. School mission and vision focus heavily on improving the quality of training results by learning participants. School values are evident from practice.	> The school council has enshrined and approved the school's mission and vision. > Responsibilities are clearly defined at school.
2. Strategy and planning	> The school management devises strategic documents in cooperation with other personnel, students, social partners and other stakeholders. > The school management regularly evaluates the implementation of adopted strategic documents.	> The school council adopted an annual work plan, financing plan and content plan.
3. Financing	> The school management uses financial resources according to sound management principles. > The school management systematically provides for additional financial resources (e.g. projects, additional services, donations, contributions, tenders etc.).	> The school management uses financial resources according to sound management principles.
4. Partnership (companies, local communities, parents)	> The school management systematically engages the development council and the council of parents when fulfilling school objectives and implementing school processes.	> The school has in place a development council or any other form of cooperation by social partners. > The council of parents meets at least twice a year.

AREA 2: QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
5. Comprehensive quality system	> The school agrees on a comprehensive quality assurance system and puts it in writing.	> The school appoints an operative quality assurance group. The school publishes a quality report at its website every year.
6. Self-evaluation	> Self-evaluations and continuous improvements constitute an integral part of all school processes.	> The school conducts an annual organised self-evaluation exercise and defines self-evaluation areas in the annual work plan.
7. Networking	> The school cooperates in quality development networks (exchange of experience, examples of good practice, reinforcement of mutual trust and result comparison).	

AREA 3: TRAINING PROCESS PLANNING

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
8. School curriculum	> This document makes it possible for the school to implement its development strategy, pedagogical approach and considers proposals put forward by employers, students and parents. > The school agrees on methodology for elaboration of the curriculum and puts it in writing.	> The school puts in writing the school curriculum for individual educational programmes. It presents the school curriculum in an adequate form to all stakeholders.
9. Open curriculum	> By elaborating the open curriculum, the school takes into account the needs of the local environment, employers and students.	> The open curriculum is elaborated in cooperation with social partners and is approved every year at the school council as a part of the annual work plan.

AREA 4: LEARNING AND TEACHING

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
10. Development of the learning environment	> The school has a range of modern and appropriate equipment (conforming to ergonomic, economic and health standards). > Students can receive training at different learning sites (workshops, lab, computer classroom, company, inter-company training centre...). > Students can use computers (in computer classrooms or elsewhere) also outside school hours.	> The school has rooms for learning and other activities accessible to both students and teachers. > The school has appropriately accessible library facilities and is well stocked with books.
11. School climate	> The school endeavours to create a positive and inclusive school climate (high level of a cooperative culture, developed culture of a good community, wellbeing of students).	> The school provides for and promotes cooperation between students and co-workers. > The school submits basic information to students in relation to health issues and interpersonal relations (drugs, sexuality, smoking, psychological and physical problems...). It enables access to institutions offering counselling and help.
12. Development of teaching methods	> Teachers use different or combined learning methods and forms promoting students to actively cooperate in teamwork. > When developing their own work methods, teachers cooperate with other teachers, most often within the teacher programme assembly. > The teacher develops an individualised approach, focuses on students' strong points and encourages excellence, creativity and cooperation with others in students.	> Teachers use contemporary methods of teaching adapted to student needs, at the same time employing learning resources and material.
13. Support offered to students in learning	> The school conceives an individualised support plan for all students. > The school monitors activities accompanying the onset of learning problems by way of documentation.	> The teacher has weekly one-hour session dedicated to student counselling. > The school conceives a support plan for students, targeting especially low-performing students.

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
14. Textbooks and learning material	> The school enables access to textbooks (it has put in place a well-functioning textbook fund etc.) which is appropriately adapted to individual groups of training participants. > The school enables the application of modern learning resources to teachers and students (Internet, e-material, independent learning material...). > The school supports the development of learning material in the classroom. > The school bolsters the use of e-material in the classroom.	> The school provides for basic textbooks and learning material to socially disadvantaged groups of students.

AREA 5: TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
15. Knowledge assessment plan	> The school develops knowledge testing and assessment methods in line with curricular objectives and principles, learning and teaching strategies as well as characteristics and expectations of students.	> The programme teacher assembly and/or school working group elaborates the knowledge assessment plan and other assessment rules at the beginning of the school year.
16. Recording and reporting on implementation of learning objectives	> The recording and reporting methods on meeting learning objectives are transparent, streamlined and student-friendly.	> The school makes arrangements for openness of the assessment process, recording of meeting the learning objectives and student information.

AREA 6: MEETING TRAINING OBJECTIVES

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
17. Percentage of students successfully completing training within planned timescale	> The school strives for a minimum of 95 % of students to complete education.	> At least 80 % of students successfully finish training within planned timescale.

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
18. Performance at final examinations and/or vocational matura	> At least 90 % pass rate of all applicants taking the examination.	> At least 80 % pass rate of all applicants taking the examination.
19. Participation at regional, national and international gatherings and knowledge and skills competition	> As many students as possible participate at regional, national and international gatherings and knowledge and skills competitions.	
20. External evaluations reports	> In addition to self-evaluation, the school endeavours to obtain external evaluation reports (attested by marks and achievements) from the appropriate evaluation institution.	
21. Employability	> The school monitors employment of students after they complete training (setting up of the appropriate system to serve this purpose).	
22. Further training	> The school monitors further training of students after they complete training (setting up of the appropriate system to serve this purpose).	

AREA 7: WORK BASED PRACTICAL TRAINING

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
23. Planning implementation of work-based practical training	> The school produces a comprehensive plan on implementation of work-based practical training (including the analysis of the company's learning capabilities). > The school stays in continuous contact with work-based training providers and checks if the agreed objectives are met.	> The school drafts: a list of students, range of employers, workplace approval and operative programme for implementation of work-based practical training.
24. Monitoring of students	> The school designs the plan on student monitoring which is coordinated with mentors in companies. > The practical training organiser pays regular visits to work-based practical training sessions.	> The practical training organiser pays a visit to students during work-based practical training at least once a year.

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
25. Mentor training	> The school organises training for mentors in companies in cooperation with the chamber. > Regular mentor training cycles are conducted at school. > The school agrees on measures for improving quality with mentors in companies and monitors their implementation.	> The school organises an annual meeting with work-based practical training mentors to familiarise them with all novelties.

AREA 8 : COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT TO STUDENTS

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
26. Career counselling, information and counselling offered to students	> The school elaborates a comprehensive information and counselling system targeting students (providing for their personal, social and career development) whereby the competence between counsellors and teachers is clearly delineated. > The requisite information for student is also available on the Web. Students can also access it on the school premises. > The schools provides for information and identification of possible choices in the programmes for students. > An individualised training plan for every student is elaborated.	> The school conducts an introductory individualised talk with students upon matriculation. > The counselling service prevents the onset of problems stemming from transition from primary to secondary school in 1st class students. > Every student participates in the workshop on school learning and work methods at school. > An individualised learning plan for students failing to reach a minimum standard of knowledge.
27. Providing for unsuccessful students	> The school drafts a strategy and proposes measures for reduction of repetition of a year. Repetition of a year is seen as an exceptional measure.	> The school applies measures aimed at prevention of repetition of a year (conclusion of a pedagogical treaty for a low-performing individual, an increased scope of work-based practical training for individuals).
28. Providing for students dropping out of school	> The schools makes provision so that a dropout is involved in an organised form of training or work, thereby cooperating with relevant institutions in the local and wider environment (institutions, companies, social work centres).	> The school performs a final talk (as students leave school, a talk with every student is organised with the view to counsel and guide him/her).

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
29. Support for special-needs students	> Organization of alternative forms of training by taking into consideration special needs. > High-quality implementation of special contents.	> An individualised schooling and education plan for every student. > Individual monitoring of every student (monitoring of plan implementation).
30. Student satisfaction	> Students identify with the school and are satisfied with it.	> The school determines student satisfaction.

AREA 9: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AND OTHER PRACTITIONERS

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
31. Work with new teachers	> The school has a work strategy for new teachers. > The school makes relevant provisions for new teachers so that mentors inform them about different pedagogical practices in school work, while also giving them an opportunity to test them.	> The mentor draws up a school work plan in cooperation with a new teacher.
32. Teacher training	> The school elaborates a long-term strategy for teacher training. > An individualised plan of additional education and training for teachers at school (annual career talk; a well functioning system of annual career talks – management of teacher career development). > The school encourages teacher rotations in companies.	> The annual work plan states all forms of additional education and training for teachers.
33. Monitoring of teacher work	> The school promotes mutual attendance at classes by teachers, especially from the perspective of mutual learning.	> The school defines an annual plan on monitoring the work of teachers and attendance in education work.
34. School working groups and teacher programme assemblies	> The school promotes actions taken by school working groups and teacher programme assembly which contribute to its development.	> The school organises the work of teacher assemblies and school working groups in accordance with organisation methods and development objectives.
35. Teacher satisfaction	> Teachers identify with school and are satisfied with it.	> The school determines teacher satisfaction.

AREA 10: SCHOOL AS THE LIFELONG LEARNING CENTRE

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
36. Training programmes	> The school has a well developed and defined offer of non-formal training targeting different groups of users (unemployed, employed...) in accordance with lifelong learning objectives, needs of an individual, work sphere and the local environment.	
37. Implementation of programmes targeting adults and leading to obtaining of training	> The school makes a diversified offer of programmes and cooperates in these efforts with the employment service, companies and individuals. > The school regularly submits bids at tenders for development and for obtaining funds for the development of adapted executions and programme implementation.	
38. Evaluation of non-formal learning	> The school elaborates a methodology for assessment of non-formal learning. > Upon matriculation and during training, the school recognises knowledge students have obtained outside school classes and in other forms of training, on the job etc.	> The teacher assembly establishes criteria and procedures for validation of non-formal learning. > The school monitors and reports on the number of introductory talks, the number of applications for recognition of non-formal learning and the number of issued decisions.
39. Participants	> The school endeavours to include as many different groups of participants in lifelong learning programmes as possible (adults, specific and interest groups).	> 5 % of participants in lifelong learning programmes as compared with all training participants.
40. Leisure time offer	> The school develops as the local centre of cultural, sport and social activities of the youth and adults.	

AREA 11: DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Quality indicators	Guidelines for improving quality	Basic quality level
41. Project with Slovene partners	> The school is engaged in development work also through participation in Slovene projects. Project results have a positive impact on improving the quality of work. Thus, the school meets national objectives in relation to VET development.	> The school participates in a Slovene project at least every 3 years.
42. Projects with international partners	> The school is engaged in development work also through participation in international projects. Project results have a positive impact on improving the quality of work. Thus, the school meets international objectives in relation to VET development. > The school has forged partner links in the international arena.	> The school participates in an international project at least every 5 years.