

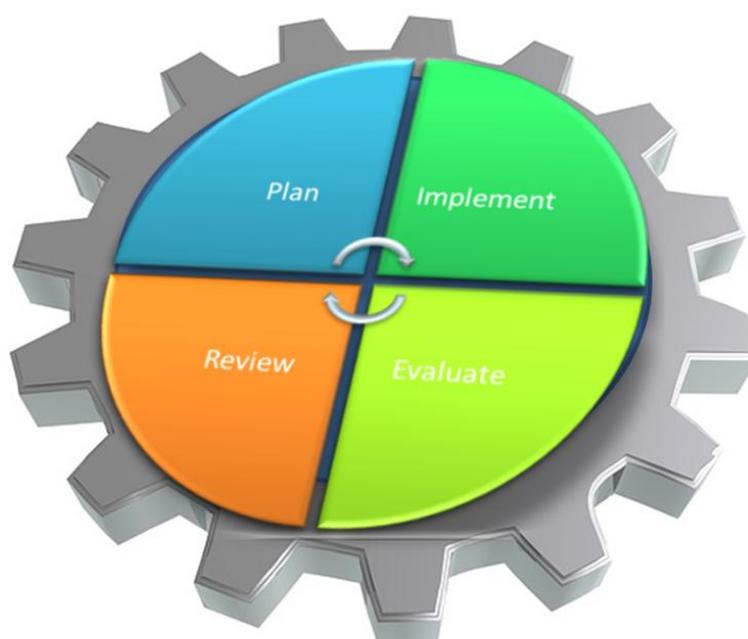
2016



EQVET-US

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET TOWARDS NEW ECO SKILLS  
AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

# RECOMMENDATION GUIDE



**Editorial information:**

This publication has been developed by the ERASMUS+ project partnership EQVET-US, <http://eqvet-us.upm.ro>, coordinated by UPM.

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## CONTENTS

Foreword.....	4
Recommendation Guide: objectives and key considerations.....	5
EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set: overview of implementation and testing.....	5
Good Practices of Implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set.....	7
Strategies for Implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET Organizations .....	15
Conclusion.....	18

## Foreword

EQVET-US is an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project - KA2 Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. It is implemented in the period between September 2014 and August 2016 by the consortium of seven partner organizations from six European countries:

Partner	Country	Organization	
P1	Romania	UPM	UNIVERSITATEA PETRU MAIOR DIN TARGU MURES
P2	Portugal	ISQ	INSTITUTE FOR TECHNOLOGY AND QUALITY
P3	Austria	BEST Institut GmbH	BEST INSTITUT FUR BERUFSBEZOGENE WEITERBILDUNG UND PERSONALTRAINING GMBH
P4	Romania	CET	COLEGIUL ECONOMIC TRANSILVANIA
P5	Germany	EVBB	EUROPÄISCHER VERBAND BERUFLICHER BILDUNGSTRÄGER E.V. EVBB
P6	Bulgaria	ECQ Ltd.	EUROPEAN CENTER FOR QUALITY OOD
P7	France	IDEProjet	IDEPROJET

One of the EQVET-US key objectives is to establish and implement a quality system in the area of sustainable development of VET providers. In order to achieve this objective the project consortium has developed two major intellectual outputs:

- EQVET-US Framework, which sets up a series of quality indicators to assess, monitor and promote sustainable development at VET institutions;
- EQVET-US Practice Set, which provides a self-diagnostic tool and an implementation guide facilitating the application of EQVET-US Framework by VET institutions.

Between November 2015 and April 2016 the project partners implemented a series of activities and events for testing EQVET-US outputs:

- Internal EQVET-US testing in the partner organizations and
- National pilot events in all partners' countries for testing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set with project stakeholders.

The results of internal and external testing were summarised in a Compilation Report. This Report described feedback of events' participants on EQVET-US outputs and briefly outlined good practices and effective strategies for implementing EQVET-US approach at VET institutions. The results presented in Compilation Report constitute the basis for the present Recommendation Guide.

## Recommendation Guide: objectives and key considerations

Recommendation Guide for Framework and Practice Set is one of the main outputs of EQVET-US project. It is aimed to facilitate transferability of EQVET-US outputs to VET institutions in European countries beyond the project consortium.

Based on the national testing results of EQVET-US outputs in the partners' countries (see Compilation Report), the Recommendation Guide is focused on:

- Good Practices of implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set and
- Strategies for implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET organizations.

It is address to vocational education and training providers, who are interested in improving sustainability of their institutions through introducing sustainability assessment framework into their quality management systems.

Recommendation Guide supplements EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set, as it provides guidelines for applying these instruments in practice.

## EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set: overview of implementation and testing

EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set were implemented and tested in the partner organizations (project activity O4-A1) and then introduced to a wider audience of stakeholders at national pilot events in all partners' countries (E1-E6). These activities were aimed to:

- validate EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set through their testing with the project stakeholders (inside and outside the partner organizations);
- reflect on usability and added value of the project products in national contexts;
- ensure targeted dissemination and further exploitation of the project results at national level.

**Internal testing** implied:

- initial quality self-assessment using EQVET-US Self-Diagnostic Tool;
- analysis of self-assessment results and development of action plan for improving sustainability performance;
- implementation of short-term activities due to the action plan;
- second round of self-assessment and monitoring of sustainability performance;
- evaluation of EQVET-US testing experience and reporting of the results.

EQVET-US internal testing was implemented in eleven VET institutions from Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Romania. The number of organizations involved in internal testing exceeds the number of partners in the project, because EVBB as a European network association managed to arrange EQVET-US implementations in a few member institutions (e.g. ENAIP VENETO IS in Italy and BFI OÖ

in Upper Austria<sup>1</sup>; for more details see Compilation Report). Some project partners tested EQVET-US instruments within their organizations (UPM, CET, ISQ, and BEST), while the others conducted internal testing in other VET institutions which they cooperate with. So, ECQ tested EQVET-US products at Institute for Postgraduate Studies (IPS) in Bulgaria and IDEProjet – in Centre de Formation Professionnelle du Midi (CFPM) in France.

Internal testing gathered 38 experts who shared their feedback on EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in eight country reports (see Compilation Report, Appendix.2).

**National pilot events** were arranged as practical workshops which implied:

- explaining EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set to participants;
- presenting internal testing results;
- testing EQVET-US outputs with participants;
- discussing “testing” experience and results in a round-table format.

The partners held six national pilot events in Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Portugal and Romania. Each workshop was attended by 15-20 participants. Altogether, EQVET-US “external” testing gathered 104 stakeholders from 77 different organizations, including VET providers, consultancy organizations, policy makers in VET sector, QMS certifying organizations, business companies, employment organizations, political institutions and municipalities.

Participants of both internal and external testing evaluated usability, applicability, transferability and added value of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set. They provided their feedback on the developed outputs in evaluation forms. Evaluation results proved that the EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set are effective instruments for improving sustainability of VET organizations. EQVET-US outputs should be viewed as complimentary to quality management approach accepted in VET institution.

After implementation of testing activities (O4-A1 and E1-E6), the partners summarised good practices and lessons learned, tips and strategies for implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set, suggestions for enhancing transferability of EQVET-US products to other VET institutions. The recommendations the partners came up with based on their testing experience are provided below in the following sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Official project partner institution from Austria is BEST Institut GMBH. BFI OÖ participated in EQVET-US internal testing as a member of EVBB network.

## Good Practices of Implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set

This section contains a set of good practices related to implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET institutions from the partners' countries.

A “good practice” can be defined as follows<sup>2</sup>:

*A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.*

In the context of EQVET-US project, “good practices” reflect successful experiences gained in the process of implementing and testing EQVET-US approach.

Good practices documented by the project partner institutions can be systemized into four groups.

**1. The first group of “good practices” refers to internal quality management processes.** The partners pointed out that EQVET-US implementation in their organizations allowed them to:

- Reflect on their quality management systems and the possibility to incorporate in them the indicators directly linked with sustainable development;
- Improve communication and teamwork between different departments, which is a prerequisite for accurate self-assessment.

The partners also emphasized the significance of management support in quality management initiatives, as only management has the power to approve the action plan and ensure its implementation.

### Good practice 1

**Title:** Reflection on the own Quality Management System

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set  
(based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** ISQ - Portugal

**Description:**

EQVET-US implementation allowed ISQ Training Unit to reflect upon its own quality management system tools and incorporation of some EQVET-US indicators linked directly with sustainable development. On the other hand, it also allowed ISQ Training Unit to formally recognize some good practices concerning promotion of sustainable development.

With regard to linking EQVET-US Reference Framework with ISQ Quality Management System, further adaptations were considered necessary for the instruments to be fully applied to ISQ specific context.

<sup>2</sup> This conceptual definition of a good practice is taken from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN. URL: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/ap784e/ap784e.pdf>

**Good practice 2**

**Title:** **Enthusiasm and effective teamwork during EQVET-US self-assessment**

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set  
(based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** “Transilvania” Economic College of Tirgu-Mures - Romania

**Description:**

Implementation of EQVET-US tools at CET required establishing new collaboration practices within the whole institution. The experts responsible for EQVET-US testing came up with the following list of practices which were essential for proper and successful self-assessment:

- Communicating the intention to undertake EQVET-US self-assessment and promoting a common understanding of EQVET-US instruments within all College departments;
- Gathering a team of experts, representing different departments, for conducting EQVET-US self-assessment. Team members were to have experience in quality assurance and a good knowledge of College policies;
- Brainstorming answers to the questions (see Self-Diagnostic Tool in EQVET-US Practice Set) in all indicator groups, sharing individual experiences, knowledge and perceptions within the expert team, agreeing about assessment of the organization’s realities.
- Gaining management support for the entire process of EQVET-US self-assessment and, later, for development and implementation of improvement plan.

EQVET-US self-assessment at CET allowed for looking at daily College activities from different perspectives and evaluating them on the basis of collective knowledge of involved experts. Knowledge sharing and collaboration within a diverse group of experts promoted enthusiasm and friendship within the team.

**Good practice 3**

**Title:** **Internal quality management policies**

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set  
(based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** ENAIP VENETO IS - Italy (a member of EVBB - Germany)

**Description:**

ENAIP VENETO IS found it useful to get aware of all internal documents, such as organization’s strategic plan, quality plan, health and risks plans, etc. before conducting EQVET-US self-assessment. Awareness about internal policies and processes, as well as access to reference documents, is crucial for accurate self-assessment.

Implementation of EQVET-US instruments would be easier for a VET institution, if it has already established and started to use a quality management system.

**2. The second group of “good practices” refers to reflection on sustainability pillars** and their manifestation in training service delivery. Reflecting on *environmental sustainability*, the partner organizations concluded they have to be conscious about environmental impact of every decision they take (resource productivity, energy efficiency, waste problem, water pollution, etc.). They also emphasized the necessity to promote sustainability through training content (new curricular with the element of environmental education, attention to the development of eco-skills).

Regarding *social sustainability*, EQVET-US implementation allowed to reflect on the ways of mitigating negative social impacts (e.g. work accidents, human rights abuses, exploitation) and maximizing positive ones (e.g. creation of employment and wealth, social inclusion). The partner organizations realized the necessity of continuing education and training of staff, provision of safe and comfortable working/teaching/ learning spaces, training delivery through various channels including Open Education platforms.

Reflecting on *economic sustainability*, the partner organizations emphasized the need to balance the trainers-trainees ratio in order to provide effective training (minimal number of students in a group for sufficient profitability and quality training results).

#### **Good practice 4**

**Title:** Reflection on three pillars of sustainability at VET institution

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** “Petru Maior” University of Tirgu Mures (UPM) - Romania

#### **Description:**

Reflecting on three pillars of sustainability, UPM outlined the following practices that were or should be implemented at their institution to promote sustainable training delivery.

#### Environmental pillar:

- *“Environmental education”*: UPM should incorporate sustainability in their competency model. Development of sustainability literacy should become an integral objective of curricular content.
- *“Paperless classes”*: production and usage of electronic teaching/learning materials should save money and space and minimize environmental damage.
- *“Eco-friendly evaluation tools”*: UPM should promote the usage of electronic assessment methods supported by learning management systems (Moodle) and such software as Student Response System (SRS), Peer Learning Evaluation (PeLe), One2act.
- *Recycling*: UPM will discuss with product suppliers a possibility to take back for recycling such “used products” as, for instance, paper and toner cassettes for printers, copiers, faxes.
- *Waste separation*: the university should use garbage bins with several sections for different types of waste.

#### Social pillar:

- *UPM has already*: provided all employees with health insurance in accordance with the legal regulations in Romania; created comfortable working conditions (sufficient working spaces, comfortable furniture, access to daylight and fresh air, etc.).
- *UPM’s desired actions* for improving social sustainability include: offering continuing education and

training for staff on annual basis; creating conditions for work-life balance (e.g. offering study facilities to family member of UPM employees); assuring equal career opportunities for all employed at UPM.

- “*Social inclusion*”: the main challenge is to involve disadvantaged groups in educational activities. UPM has established Open Distance Learning Department to reach those people who cannot attend regular classes. However, other actions promoting social inclusion should be thought out and implemented.

Economic pillar:

- UPM’s Counselling and Career Orienting Centre performs regular studies about the number of graduates that are able to enter the labour market after having completed a degree/training course. The results are published on UPM’s website.
- UPM constantly analyses its profitability and return on investment in research, development and innovation.
- Sustainable consumption: UPM is going to provide a possibility to purchase Fair-Trade products and locally produced fruits in its cafeteria.

**3. The third group of “good practices” gives an example of improvement measures** that EQVET-US self-assessment helped to develop for enhancing organizations’ sustainability.

**Good practice 5**

**Title:** Improvement of organizations’ sustainability

**Source:** External testing of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set  
(based on national pilot event results)

**Author:** ECQ - Bulgaria

**Description:**

External testing of EQVET-US instruments at the multiplier event in Bulgaria was arranged in the form of a practical exercise. The exercise was designed as a series of case studies describing EQVET-US self-assessment results in seven VET organizations. Each exercise included:

- Organization’s self-assessment results per indicators groups (seven areas of social responsibility) in a table and a diagram formats (see EQVET-US Framework);
- A part of Self-Diagnostic Tool, completed by the organization and containing the answers to the questions in that indicator which received the lowest self-assessment result (see EQVET-US Practice Set);
- Action plan template (see EQVET-US Practice Set).

Seven case studies described seven different EQVET-US indicators. The task was to analyse the organization’s responses, identify weaknesses and develop an action plan to improve organization’s performance according to that indicator.

The event participants implemented this exercise in small groups of two-three people. Their solutions to the case study problems were considered as “good practices”. Here are a few examples:

**1: Improvement of Indicator P.A.1**

*Indicator group:* Organizational governance

*Education process stage:* Design of training provision

*Question:* How do you consult relevant stakeholders in your policy about training offers?

*Case study answer:* Organization uses a few communication channels to inform stakeholders about upcoming training sessions and education offers (e.g. professional associations and networks, direct e-mailing).

*Evaluation score:* Basic – 1 point.

*Suggested actions according to the Action Plan:*

**Objective:** Improve stakeholders' awareness about upcoming training sessions and education offers.

Action.1: Analyse communication channels used and evaluate their effectiveness.

Indicator: the number of analyses (probably, one).

Resources: expert time.

Evidence: analysis results.

Effectiveness: identified strength and weaknesses of currently used communication channels.

Action.2: Survey stakeholders and find out which communication channels they use / through which they prefer receive information about new training offers.

Indicator: the number of surveys.

Resources: expert time.

Evidence: survey results; new (potentially more effective) channels identified.

Effectiveness: usage of new communication channels improves stakeholders' awareness about training offers.

## **2: Improvement of Indicator E.A.2**

*Indicator group:* Human rights

*Education process stage:* Training Evaluation

*Question:* Do you have a satisfaction questionnaire for trainees measuring learning outcomes perceptions?

*Case study answer:* No. There is no such a questionnaire.

*Evaluation score:* Poor – 0 points.

*Suggested actions according to the Action Plan:*

Action: Develop a satisfaction questionnaire together with necessary guidelines (procedure for using the questionnaire, who and how often should use it, how to process and analyse the results, etc.)

Indicator: filled in questionnaires.

Resources: expert (or trainer) time; for online questionnaires – software (e.g. Google surveys).

Evidence: evaluation results; number of trainees vs. number of filled in questionnaires.

Effectiveness: more trainees fill in satisfaction questionnaires → evaluation results allow to improve training provision.

## **3: Improvement of Indicator R.A.3.2**

*Indicator group:* Labour practices

*Education process stage:* Continuous Improvement

*Question:* Do you implement work-life balance initiatives within the organization?

*Case study answer:* Work-life balance is not discussed in our organization. There are no initiatives supporting work-life balance.

*Evaluation score:* Poor – 0 points.

*Suggested actions:*

Objectives: Provide a possibility of flexible working hours.

Action (short term): Develop and approve a procedure of applying for and agreeing on teaching staff working hours – balancing teaching schedule within training programs and trainers’ preferences on teaching time.

Indicator: number of drafts towards the final version of the procedure; number of approval sessions.

Resources: expert time.

Evidence: approved procedure.

Effectiveness: teachers apply for preferred working hours according to the procedure.

**4. The fourth group of “good practices” reflects the feedback on EQVET-US instruments.** The organizations, involved in internal testing, pointed out that EQVET-US Self-Assessment Tool is self-explanatory, each question contains sufficient comments, radar diagrams provide a clear visual representation of self-assessment results. The experts involved in testing emphasized the complimentary nature of EQVET-US approach to existing quality management standards.

**Good practice 6**

**Title:** Structure and content of EQVET-US instruments

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** BFI OÖ - Austria (a member of EVBB - Germany)

**Description:**

EQVET-US Self-Diagnostic Tool creates an immediate feedback. Summary table and radar diagram, as feedback tools, provide a good overview of self-assessment results. EQVET-US instruments not only help to identify challenging issues; they also allow for scoring and quantifying assessment results.

EQVET-US self-assessment helped BFI OÖ recognize the need to be more focused on customer needs and to be quicker in adapting their training contents.

**Good practice 7**

**Title:** EQVET-US Framework as a complimentary tool to ISO 9001

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** European Association for Vocational and Social Education (EBG) - Germany (a member of EVBB - Germany)

**Description:**

Based on the Quality Management System (QMS) implemented in EBG, the organization was able to compare the issues of ISO 9001 with those of EQVET-US and easily identify the aspects which needed improvement. The indicators in which EBG got excellent self-assessment results (due to EQVET-US Self-

Diagnostic Tool) correlate with the requirements of ISO 9001 (e.g. customer focus, human resource management, continuous improvement of services, and others). The indicators in which organization received low assessment results could be considered as complementary to ISO 9001 (e.g. environmental issues).

Thus, EQVET-US could be integrated into EBG's existing QMS by adding to it those EQVET-US indicators which it does not address.

### Good practice 8

**Title:** EQVET-US approach compared to QMS implemented in VET institutions: differences and complimentary effects

**Source:** Internal testing and implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (based on the results of 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment)

**Author:** ECQ (testing implemented at Institute for Post-graduate Studies, University of National and World Economy) - Bulgaria

**Description:**

IPS employs the Quality Management System aligned with the requirements of ISO 9001. EQVET-US approach to quality management is different and complimentary to the QMS IPS uses. At the same time, recent policy changes make IPS conduct annual self-assessments which correspond with the EQVET-US criteria and indicators.

Application of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in IPS allows for expanding the scope of self-assessments, carried out within their QMS, by adding new environmental and social indicators.

The analysis of self-evaluation results pointed out that IPS does not fulfil completely the indicators related to marketing, environmental issues, and infrastructure. Visualization of the results in a radar diagram helped to clearly present the results. However, the IPS management was not surprised by the findings – the results reflected the real situation which the management was aware of.

### Good practice 9

**Title:** Further implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET organizations

**Source:** External testing of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (based on national pilot event results)

**Author:** BEST - Austria

**Description:**

Some of Austrian organizations already have experience/practice/culture of quality assurance following the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training. Other organizations implement some quality processes following the PDCA as per EQAVET requirements and due to the fact that they receive public funds to deliver training programmes. These practices are considered to be a good basis for further implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set inside their organizations, particularly for carrying out annual self-assessment and developing action plans.

The combination of EQVET-US Framework with the three pillars of sustainable development and the seven social responsibility subjects is innovative and relevant for any training organizations. In particular, quite important topics in Austria are “Human rights” and “Community involvement and development” that any VET provider needs to take care of due to the current situation with refugees and the new programmes’ requirements launched by the public authorities.

#### Good practice 10

**Title:** Usability of EQVET-US instruments

**Source:** External testing of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set  
(based on national pilot event results)

**Author:** ISQ - Portugal

**Description:**

EQVET-US instruments are truly valuable for VET institutions aiming to promote sustainable development, since they allow organizations to reflect about their training provision interlinked with the core subjects of social responsibility.

EQVET-US Self-Diagnostic Tool could allow organizations to recognize activities already aligned with the principles of sustainable development and to identify improvement aspects.

## Strategies for Implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET Organizations

The institutions involved in internal and external testing of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in all partner countries came up with valuable tips and strategies which would support transferability of EQVET-US intellectual outputs to other VET organizations.

This section outlines the strategies for successful implementation of EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set in VET institutions in other European countries beyond the project consortium.

### ❖ **Take a consentient decision to implement self-evaluation using EQVET-US approach at your organization**

Top management should be convinced of the importance of self-assessment and usefulness of its end results. Motivation and involvement of management would facilitate the entire process of EQVET-US implementation: self-assessment, development of an action plan, allocation of resources, implementation of planned measures and monitoring of achieved results.

Direct participation of high level executives in the evaluation process is crucial for organization. In quality management their involvement implies setting up and heading a quality committee, formulating and establishing quality policies and objectives, providing resources and training to staff involved in self-assessment process, approving the action plan, overseeing its implementation at all levels of the organization, and finally evaluating and revising the policy in light of achieved results.

The decision to undertake EQVET-US self-assessment should be taken and approved by top management. After that, planning process can begin by defining and scheduling further activities.

### ❖ **Develop internal procedure for self-assessment**

At planning phase, it is important to define all stages and steps of evaluation process. Each organization should elaborate its own strategy for implementing EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set (e.g. partial or complete implementation), depending on established quality processes and internal organizational needs. As mentioned above, successful implementation of the Framework for Sustainable Development requires clear policy signals from management.

### ❖ **Appoint a manager in charge of self-assessment process**

A very important action to be carried out by management at this stage is to appoint a person in charge of EQVET-US self-assessment. A manager responsible for self-assessment (“project manager”) would lead the process within a working group.

### ❖ **Plan communication activities**

The aim of communication activities is to disseminate the idea and the vision of EQVET-US self-assessment among all members of staff within the organization. At this stage, management should focus on such questions as: how self-assessment can make difference; why it is a priority; how it relates to organization’s strategic plan; how it would help improve organizational performance in the area of sustainable development. They should also explain the self-assessment procedure and timeframe.

Such communication activities would increase motivation and willingness of staff to participate in EQVET-US self-assessment process and become a member of evaluation team.

❖ **Gather a team of experts to participate in self-assessment**

Make sure the team is diverse – includes people from different departments who have extensive experience in quality management and a good knowledge of organizational policies and practices, and work closely with trainees and clients. The number of team members would depend on type and size of institution, management policy, organizational culture, as well as on geographical location and available premises. The key to successful implementation of EQVET-US self-assessment is a strong personal commitment and a sense of shared responsibility between management and staff, as collaboration in organisation facilitates teamwork and enhances its effectiveness.

❖ **Ensure common understanding of EQVET-US instruments**

Train all working group experts in EQVET-US approach, so that to agree on a common methodology for implementation of EQVET-US self-assessment. EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set should be easily accessible to each member of evaluation team (e.g. on organizational website in downloadable PDF or on-line version). Examples of filled in Self-Diagnostic Tool and Action Plan may be useful for evaluators as well. It is also necessary to ensure access to all internal documents (e.g. organization's strategic plan, quality plan, health and risks plan) as reference points for accurate self-assessment.

❖ **Compile data for self-assessment in a centralized way**

Each member of self-assessment team should evaluate organization's performance in all indicators from Self-Diagnostic Tool. After individual assessments, the team should meet and agree on final evaluation results. Dialogue and discussion are an essential part of self-assessment experience, because it helps understand the differences in evaluation results and come up with an accurate conclusion.

A four step method can be used for reaching a consensus: 1) Present evidence of strengths and challenges identified in each indicator by each member of the team; 2) Reach agreement on strengths and challenges (usually consensus is reached after considering additional evidence or other information); 3) Present the range of individual scores for each indicator; 4) Agree on the final score.

❖ **Analyse the relationship between EQVET-US instruments and Quality Management System used**

Pay specific attention to those EQVET-US indicators, which complement those of the QMS implemented in organization.

❖ **If necessary, adapt EQVET-US Self-diagnostic Tool to the context of organization**

To achieve accurate evaluation results, the Self-Diagnostic Tool may need to be adapted to the specific context and needs of organisation. EQVET-US Practice Set contains a table with supplementary questions for each indicator group of the EQVET-US Framework. The questions suitable for a certain organization can be added to the basic version of the Self-Diagnostic Tool, thus adapting its content to the respective VET institution.

❖ **Proper use of EQVET-US Self-Diagnostic Tool – self-assessment procedure**

Carry out 1<sup>st</sup> self-assessment, produce a detailed report and develop an action plan (improvement plan). Pay specific attention to the indicator groups with lower results, and to the questions with "0"

and “1” rating. Implement the actions concurred in the action plan. Ensure these changes have positive effect. Carry out 2<sup>nd</sup> self-assessment and repeat the procedure. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> round of self-assessment involve new experts which could provide fresh perspective on the evaluated processes.

❖ **Preparation and implementation of improvement plan (Action Plan)**

The process of identifying improvement actions could be structured in the following way: 1) Gather improvement suggestions in a self-assessment report and group them according to topics; 2) Analyse gathered ideas and areas for improvement, define improvement actions, align them with strategic objectives; 3) Prioritize improvement actions – using different criteria calculate their impact (low, medium, high) in the areas of improvement; 4) Appoint a responsible person for each action, identify expected results, resources and schedule for its implementation.

Improvement plan may be based on the action plan developed after EQVET-US self-assessment. It can be structured according the EQVET-US indicator groups (seven subjects of social responsibility and four phases of training service delivery). In another case, it can be divided into two parts: the first one addressing activities of all employees and management board in their daily work and the other one addressing trainees, clients, interested parties, etc.

Implementation of improvement actions should be based on a structured approach including adequate monitoring and control.

❖ **Develop and approve Sustainability Strategy and promote it among all staff members**

Organization’s sustainability objectives, assessment results and improvement actions have to be communicated within organization. It would help: 1) receive support of the staff; 2) ensure replicability of improvement actions; 3) initiate good practices in sustainable approach to training delivery.

Sustainability Strategy should include four stages: 1) set up sustainability objectives; 2) describe specific actions, tasks and responsibilities; 3) track, measure and document results; 4) communicate and analyse the result, make necessary adjustments and refinements.

Sustainability Strategy should cover a period of two-three years. Quality management division should be responsible for facilitating, monitoring and controlling its implementation. Further improvement of sustainability strategy and implementation of sustainable development framework may be supplemented by external audit and certification processes.

The strategies mentioned above give an overview of steps which VET organizations could follow for successful implementation of EQVET-US approach in their institutions.

To ensure efficiency of EQVET-US self-assessment, institutions should communicate evaluation process within the organization. The idea of sustainable development, the indicators measuring sustainability of VET organization, and the instruments for evaluating and improving sustainability of provided services shall be promoted among all staff members. This will provide VET administrative staff and trainers with a shared understanding of the actions necessary to achieve sustainability objectives, at the same time motivating them to contribute to sustainable development of organization.

Furthermore, EQVET-US implementation in VET organizations would be facilitated by clear policy guidelines in the area of sustainable development, research into sustainability competences and skills, as well as development of didactic competences of teachers and trainers.

After implementation of EQVET-US sustainable development framework VET providers should find new opportunities in the community they are a part of (e.g. new partnerships, companies, suppliers), so as to be able to respond to environmental, social and economic issues the organizations face.

## Conclusion

EQVET-US pilot testing and implementation gathered a set of good practices on: sustainability at VET institutions; internal quality management processes and policies; EQVET-US complimentary nature to international quality management standards; and integration of EQVET-US approach to QMS used at VET organizations.

The list of strategies provides step-by-step practical guidelines for applying EQVET-US instruments at VET institutions. It complements the Framework and Practice Set by a series of actions an organization should undertake to ensure successful implementation of EQVET-US approach.

EQVET-US Framework and Practice Set could be implemented in any VET organization. The combination of quality cycle with three pillars of sustainability interlined with seven core subjects of social responsibility makes EQVET-US instruments more than relevant at the moment.

Implementation of Sustainability Framework in VET organizations offers a possibility to identify internal challenges of sustainable development and undertake improvement activities. It is perfectly in line with the current trend in training delivery, undergoing a transition towards more direct collaboration with business community, training institutions and other stakeholders.

EQVET-US Sustainability Framework and Practice Set provides VET institutions with an essential tool for responding to new needs of continuous improvement towards sustainability of training delivery.