

Quality of Vocational Training in Greece

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Preface

Building on the priorities of the “Leonardo” Programme to improve the quality of vocational training, CEDEFOP - The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training carried out at 1995 a study on the efforts made by several EU countries to improve the quality of initial and continuing vocational training.

The main objective of this study was the production of a document intended to be a first contribution to the policy debate on quality in vocational training at European and national levels.

The present paper is a national report on the same topic prepared for the first stage of the study.

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1. Recent history of the national efforts to improve the quality of vocational training. Legal and institutional framework. The role of social partners.

A remarkable development of initial and continuing vocational training activities has taken place in Greece during the latest decade due to a rapid increase in training needs and demands that has mainly propelled by the impacts of technological innovations in the methods of production and in the forms of work organisation and the consequent structural transformations caused to the Greek economy.

Despite however a considerable expansion in volume of the vocational training activities that occurred in last years the questions of quality have only recently begun being widely discussed and gaining in importance within the private and public training agencies and especially within the responsible State authorities, notably for reasons of public accountability, training market transparency and training effectiveness.

The leading employers' and employees' organisations are actively participating in this debate on the quality of training expressing sound views and stating substantial proposals along with an active involvement in any formal or informal planning and application of the relevant policies and efforts. Although it seems that there is not at present a commonly approved quality concept for training it is obvious that the establishment of quality standards and quality control procedures for training is being generally approved as necessary and is being supported by all the involved parts although not advocated by identical arguments.

In this framework the first national efforts to control and improve the quality of vocational training focused primarily on continuing vocational training structures and activities. A priority essentially imposed by the fact that the utilisation of considerable national and EU funds for continuing vocational training has nowadays driven continuing vocational training structures and activities to a degree of expansion, multiplicity and diversity never shown before in Greece.

These efforts are being predominantly characterised by the active State intervention and by the establishment of quality standards and quality assurance systems for training that are being developed on a legal or administrative basis.

The following two most important initiatives introduced by The Ministry of Labour with the active involvement of the social partners are typical examples of the recent national efforts towards the improvement of continuing vocational training quality.

The first one is the foundation of The National Certification Centre of Continuing Vocational Training Structures laid on the Law 2224/1994 concerning Regulations of Employment and Relevant Matters. This Centre is a public organisation already active under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour that is being administered by a Council composed by representatives of the State, employers' and employees' unions. Its main duties include the development of standards and the establishment of relevant control procedures applicable to the certification of continuing vocational training providers' structures, to the quality control and assurance of their offers and to the approval of the potential trainers along with the development of co-operation and support of transfer processes in the relevant matters on the European level.

The second initiative towards the control and improvement of continuing vocational training quality is in essence complementary to the previous one and has also come forth by The Ministry of Labour with the approval of the social partners. Its core consists of the development, legalisation by Ministerial Decisions and application of a uniform integrated system of norms and procedures for the control and assurance of a minimal level of quality and effectiveness of the continuing vocational training activities intended for specific target groups that are being organised and implemented by public and private agencies and that are being co-financed by State and EU funds.

On the other hand at the sector of initial vocational training any effort towards the control and assurance of quality is up to now being essentially confined to the post-secondary initial vocational training offered by public and private Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK).

These Institutes are operating under the supervision of The Vocational Education and Training Organisation (OEEK) and are offering labour market oriented initial and supplementary vocational training in various professional specialisations and at different certification levels intended for young and adult graduates of general or vocational secondary schools in order to facilitate their employment.

The Vocational Education and Training Organisation (OEEK) founded in 1992 is a public organisation under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education being administered by a Council composed by representatives of the State, the employees' and the employers' unions. Its main aims are the foundation and development of appropriate structures for the assessment of vocational training needs at national and

regional levels, the establishment of a unified system for the recognition and certification of any formal initial and continuing vocational training, the development and application of quality standards and of approval procedures for any formal initial and continuing training offered by any agency in the country, the foundation of its own and the supervision of any public or private Institute of Vocational Training (IEK).

The OEEK in order to assure quality and effectiveness of the training offered by the public and private Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK) has developed and applies a series of specifications, standards, regulations and guidelines concerning the material and functional standing of their training structures. Moreover many related activities that are being nowadays planned or developed by The Vocational Education and Training Organisation (OEEK) are indirectly but substantially influencing the context and the orientation of the current debate taking place in Greece on the quality of vocational training and according to the present pieces of evidence they will shape many of the future national efforts on the subject matter.

2. Critical description of the prevailing policies: definitions of quality; criteria and quality indicators.

The nowadays prevailing formulated policies for the improvement of quality and therefore effectiveness of initial and continuing vocational training in Greece, as it may be being deduced by the outlined above relevant nation-wide efforts, are being essentially characterised by two predominant features.

Their first one is the development of any relevant measures on a legal or administrative basis and their second feature is the adoption and application of universal quality norms accompanied by generally applicable quality control procedures that are principally attempting the guaranty of a minimal acceptable level of quality for vocational training.

In addition a third feature characterising exclusively the prevailing policies concerning the improvement of continuing vocational training activities might to be added. It is the public accountability and the financial management transparency that are ahead of the effectiveness of training their driving force.

In this context the concept of quality is never being clearly defined in the relevant policies both for post-secondary initial and continuing vocational training but is being fundamentally conceived in terms of the adequacy of the training structures and the

suitability of the training practices in achieving corresponded to the training needs intended outcomes.

The principal criteria for assuring quality so in post-secondary initial as in informal continuing vocational training whereon the main national efforts are being focused on, as they are being determined by the relevant legal texts and administrative guidelines, are:

- the adequacy of the identification of the targeted training needs and the effectiveness of their projection to the training objectives, designs, contents and practices;
- the effectiveness of the training plans, contents and methods in achieving positive outcomes;
- the suitability of the training materials and tools;
- the adequacy and suitability of the premises, equipment and training conditions;
- the effectiveness of training management and supervision procedures;
- the adequacy of the potential trainees' qualifications and eligibility procedures by each specific training activity and
- the expertise of the trainers.

The above mentioned quality criteria are being however objectified and applied through in many aspects different systems and procedures in the post-secondary initial and in the informal continuing vocational training systems.

In post-secondary initial vocational training the ex ante well-documented design and the detailed quantity and quality specification of each training offer's crucial component carried out by training experts is the focal point. Formal process and product evaluations are being essentially undervalued and the quality of training is post facto indirectly assessed by the qualification system on the basis of the corresponding trainee's examinations' results.

In informal continuing vocational training however the development of regional and national training plans by targeted groups and by economic activity sectors with the active involvement of the interested social partners is the starting point for the quality assurance of any included training offer considered to be leading to effective and realistic identifications of the training needs.

The formal input, process and product evaluation of training by independent evaluators and the maintenance of an effective and accurate financial control system

are indispensable elements of each continuing vocational training activity. In addition a cost-effectiveness dimension is predominant in every training structural and operational component of the training offers since a maximum acceptable cost for any of its critical factors is predetermined by the supervising public authority.

Ultimately the quality of any continuing vocational training offer is being assessed by its adequacy and relevance in meeting the vocational and employment needs of the participants along with its accordance to the requirements of the labour market at the optimal financial cost.

Finally a worthwhile difference between the above outlined nowadays prevailing policies for the improvement of quality of initial and informal continuing vocational training have to be noted.

Both policies consider trainers' expertise as one of the crucial factors for assuring quality in training and any of the systems and procedures they are being applied through includes norms and specifications for the required trainers' qualifications and competencies. Only however in the framework of the continuing vocational training policies some concrete doubtless insufficient measures for upgrading the training skills and the professional competencies of the trainers are being planned, taken up or financed.

3. Implementation of training quality programmes and pilot projects

Two main programmes aiming at the improvement of the quality of vocational training are being to date carried out at national level in Greece and they are both concerning continuing vocational training structures.

The first one is being focused on the development and application of a formal system for the certification of the continuing vocational training delivering centres and is being carried out by The National Certification Centre of Continuing Vocational Training Structures in collaboration with The Ministry of Labour.

Training agencies delivering informal continuing vocational training that is being co-financed by the State and EU funds had to have accredited training organisation status in accordance with a relevant legal regulation. A system of quantitative and qualitative norms and the corresponding verification procedures has set up and is being used to provide this status that is classified in two main levels: region-wide and nation-wide training organisation status. The main aim of the system is to ensure an acceptable level of quality and effectiveness for the provided informal continuing vocational training as well as to improve the transparency of the training market.

The key elements of the system are concerning:

- the suitability and adequacy of material resources;
Training organisations had to have suitable and adequate for training delivery premises, equipment and training conditions.
- the selection and competence of training and management staff;
Training providers had to have sufficient and appropriately qualified and experienced contracted trainers to deliver training.
- the efficiency of training and financial management;
Training organisations had to have appropriately trained managerial staff and planned methods for the management of their provision and for the accurate maintenance of their fiscal systems.
- the availability of on-the-job training facilities;
Training organisations had to have available on-the-job training places demanded by relevant training offers through networks of local enterprise companies.

- the existence and efficient operation of training needs research structures;

Training organisations of a nation-wide status had to have the appropriate structures for the identification of training needs and for their effective projection to training plans.

A set of specific quantitative and qualitative standards differentiated by training organisation status' level and by training subjects classified by economic activities' sectors as well as the corresponding verification procedures have explicitly designated and are being applied for each one of the above mentioned key elements.

The second programme for the improvement of the quality of vocational training is being focused on the planning and management of continuing vocational training activities and is being carried out to date by The Ministry of Labour and the public agencies planning, offering or implementing any kind of informal continuing training activities that are being co-financed by the State and EU funds.

A formal system of management regulations, quality standards and quantitative norms along with their relevant application procedures has set up and is being used by this year for the planning, organisation and management of the informal in-company and out of the company continuing training activities intended to various target groups.

The main aims of the system are to ensure a minimal acceptable level of quality and effectiveness at the optimal financial cost, to improve financial transparency and to reinforce public accountability for the supplied by public agencies and contracted training organisations informal continuing vocational training activities.

The main components of the system are:

- a series of regulations and procedures for the development of regional and national training plans by targeted groups and by economic activity sectors with the active involvement of the correspondingly interested social partners - regional and national public agencies, employers and employees - aiming to effective and realistic identifications of the training needs;
- a set of quantitative norms for the maximum acceptable cost of any critical factor of the training offer along with the relevant financial recording systems and control procedures;

- a set of qualitative standards for the designs, contents and practices of the training offers and
- a series of specifications and guidelines for the required formal input, process, product and follow-up evaluations of the training offers.

The system has legally established and its application is a presupposition for the co-financement by the State and/or EU funds of any informal continuing vocational training activity.

Finally it must to be mentioned that few training organisations are to date developing or applying experimentally non traditional quality control systems for their training activities based for example on the ISO-9000 series standards (The Companies Institute for the Industrial and Professional Training of their Staff - IVEPE) or on participatory forms of training and evaluation (The Labour Institute of the General Workers' Confederation of Greece - INE/GSEE). These projects are however unique and non representative of the national scenery of vocational training quality control and assurance.

4. Quality control systems and their functioning

In the framework of the policies and systems previously outlined it has not in a strict sense developed or established any formal operational system for the quality control of training beyond the legal and administrative norms and regulations along with their corresponding application procedures. In a such context the quality control and assurance of the vocational training activities are being attempted by two distinct clusters of coherent measures that are being initiated and applied by the responsible agencies.

The first cluster of quality assurance measures is based on the development and application of specifications, norms, standards, regulations and guidelines concerning:

- training plans, designs and processes;
- training methods and practices;
- training tools and materials;
- training premises, equipment and environment conditions;

- training management and supervision principles and procedures;
- trainees' assessment procedures;
- potential trainees' eligibility criteria and procedures by each particular training activity and
- trainers' qualifications and proficiencies.

The initiation and application of these measures are usually the subject matter of responsible departments of the public agencies that are being involved in the organisation, implementation or financing of initial or continuing training activities.

The second cluster of measures that is being applied for the quality control and assurance of the vocational training is based on systematic formative and summative evaluations of the training activities or of their selected operational components and aspects that are being carried on by training managers or by independent evaluators.

These evaluations are usually including:

- training policy evaluation focused on accordance to the vocational and employment needs and to the requirements of the labour market;
- decision making processes evaluation focused on the planning, development and implementation of the training activities;
- evaluation of the objectives, designs and contents of the training activities focused on their adequacy in meeting the participants' training needs and expectations as well as on the extent of their applicability to employment;
- evaluation of the access and participation conditions of the targeted individuals to the training activities;
- evaluation of the critical process factors of the training activities (proficiency of the trainers, suitability of the training methods, media, materials, premises, equipment and conditions);
- evaluation of the organisational and administrative arrangements of the training activities and

- evaluation of the net training outcomes focused on the training impacts on the professional competencies and the employment situation of the trained individuals.

The data for these evaluations and for the corresponding quality assessment of the training activities are being collected by surveys using suitably structured questionnaires and interviews directed accordingly to the trainees, trainers, training managers, trained persons, employers, company managers and occasionally to the employers' and employees' unions' delegates.

These questionnaires and interviews are structured around their views, opinions and assessments for the quality and effectiveness of the critical components of training activities themselves and for their impacts on the individuals' professional competencies along with their appreciation of the training relevance to their training needs and employment situation.

In addition many public or state-controlled training agencies carry on continual informal process evaluations of their training offers having essentially a formative character. These evaluations that are being conducted by their responsible departments are based on data collected by internal audits, inquiries, reviews, process observations and checks during the various implementation stages of each training activity.

Finally and as a rule in the formal initial post-secondary vocational training offered by the Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK) the qualification system is used for the provision of indicators for the quality of training offers. In such cases the trainee's examinations are conforming to uniform standards and their results are being taken as relatively reliable but in any case indirect quality indicators.

5. Results: Quality assurance and evaluation

The training quality management and assurance concepts as it has previously mentioned have only the latest years begun being widely discussed and gaining in importance within the various training agencies and responsible public authorities and the first relevant nation-wide efforts are quite recent and primarily focused on the continuing vocational training structures and activities.

From this point of view their impacts on the quality assurance and improvement of vocational training are not yet precisely perceptible and hence they could not to be being reliably assessed.

It may however to be said that even the formal establishment and application of specifications, norms and regulations attempting to assure a minimal quality and effectiveness level as well as to improve public accountability of vocational training sectors is already a great forward step since such kind of nation-wide efforts occurs for first time in the country.

Besides the first measures for the quality control and improvement of training initiated by The Ministry of Labour have already marked multiplicative results.

Many state-controlled training agencies and training departments of large companies are beginning to adopt and apply identical or equivalent quality control and assurance measures. For example The state-controlled Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) has adopted and to date applies a set of equivalent measures for the quality control and assurance of the in-company continuing vocational training activities that is co-financing or the Training Division of the large private company National Bank of Greece S.A. is currently involved in a European partnership working for the development and application of a quality control and assurance system for the continuing training activities addressed to banking personnel.

6. Comments on the effectiveness of the policies and systems

The nowadays formulated policies and the corresponding nation-wide efforts for the improvement of quality and effectiveness of initial and continuing vocational training in Greece, as it has many times mentioned, are being predominantly characterised by the development of any relevant measures on a legal or administrative basis through an active State involvement and by the adoption and application of universal quality norms

and generally applicable quality control procedures that are principally aiming at the assurance of a minimal acceptable training quality level.

These policies and the induced establishment of the outlined training quality control and assurance systems may to be considered as a great forward step apart from their specific attributes since any such kind of nation-wide effort occurs for first time in the country. On the other hand their quite recent introduction does not yet permit any substantial perception and reliable assessment of their effectiveness.

It may to be said however that such a kind of policies and the induced systems are suffering by a number of disadvantages that are undermining their genuine application and their long term effectiveness. Among them may to be included as being crucial:

- the inherent contradiction underlying any establishment of universal quality standards and generally applicable quality assurance procedures that have to be functional and effective in any type and form of training activity as well as in any of their particular components. On the one hand training quality standards and assurance procedures have to be uniform and independent from any specific training agency, type, form, content or setting (national norms, standards and regulations) and on the other hand they have to be applicable and adaptable to anyone training structure's and activity's specific type, form, content and settings.
- the intrinsic disadvantage carried on by the establishment of any training quality control and assurance systems that are being developed and based on predominantly legal and administrative regulations. Although such systems apparently promote the public accountability and the financial management transparency of the overall training systems it seems that they do not in a great extent reinforce the development and application by the training agencies themselves of internal effective structures for the essential quality improvement and assurance of their training offers.
- the inevitably controversial concerns and interests for the financial and the subsequent operational control of the vocational training activities that are actually even implicitly being arisen by any policy and system for the quality assurance and improvement of training that has as primary driving force the financial management transparency since the impacts of such policies and systems in the allocation of the public and EU funds for training, that nowadays share a

considerable portion of the vocational training expenditures, seems to be indisputable.

Two additional facts may to be negatively contribute to the application and possibly to the effectiveness of the nowadays policies and efforts towards the assurance and the improvement of vocational training quality in Greece.

The first is the lack of a clearly stated and commonly accepted quality concept for the training activities in the formulated policies and the corresponding established systems that is yielding serious misunderstandings and even discrepancies between the concerned actors that are already perceptible.

The second fact that may negatively influence the efforts for the quality improvement of training is the relatively undervalued role that the evaluation of initial and continuing vocational training had up to date in the country and a consequent inadequate development of applicable, integrated and effective evaluation models approaching the quality dimensions of training.

It seems however that in any case the future trends in the quality assurance and improvement of the vocational training ventures in Greece will be directed at the development and establishment of similar uniform structures. It is also foreseeable in a such development a strong European influence as it is in any current initiative on the matters of quality in vocational training due mainly to the impacts of a wide transfer of relevant information, ideas and experiences between training agencies and training managers that it has and it is continuously being taken place in the context of the EU programmes and initiatives.

7. Schematised summary

MAIN TRAINING QUALITY COMPONENTS AND CRITERIA

Level	Quality of design		Quality of conformance	
	Initial VT	Continuing VT	Initial VT	Continuing VT
Policy Administration	Adequacy of training needs' identification Effectiveness of training needs' projection to training objectives, designs, contents and practices	Adequacy of training needs' identification Effectiveness of training needs' projection to training objectives, designs, contents and practices	Training effectiveness	Public accountability Financial transparency Cost-effect optimisation Training effectiveness
Institution	Efficiency of the training plans in achieving positive results	Efficiency of the training plans in achieving positive results	Adequacy and suitability of premises, equipment and training conditions Efficiency of the training and financial management	Adequacy and suitability of premises, equipment and training conditions Cost-efficient delivery Efficiency of the training and financial management On-the-job training
Course Programme Delivery	Efficiency of contents, methods and practices	Efficiency of contents, methods and practices	Suitability of training tools and materials	Suitability of training tools and materials
Trainer	Sufficiency of qualifications and experience	Sufficiency of qualifications and experience		Upgrading training skills
Trainee	Adequacy of the potential trainees' qualifications and eligibility procedures	Adequacy of the potential trainees' qualifications and eligibility procedures	Trainee's success rates	Meeting training and employment needs

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Case studies of quality control and evaluation measures applied to in-company or for the company continuing vocational training activities in Greece.

Law 2224 of 6 July 1994 on Regulations of Employment and Other Relevant Matters, The Hellenic Republic Government Journal, no 112, vol. A, 1994.

By the article 17 of this Law The National Certification Centre of Continuing Vocational Training Structures is founded and its main aims are stated.

Law 2009 of 14 February 1992 on The establishment of a national system for vocational education and training, The Hellenic Republic Government Journal, , no 18, vol. A, 1992.

By the articles of this Law a formal system for initial and continuing vocational education and training is established, The Vocational Education and Training Organisation (OEEK) is founded as the supervising authority and the Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK) as the main training agencies of this system.

SEV and INE-GSEE, A study for the formation of continuing vocational training structures, Athens, 1993.

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The Ministry of Labour, Management and control system for the continuing vocational training activities co-financed by EU funds and procedures for its application, Ministerial Decision 115373 of 11 November 1994.

Legal text stating a management and control system including quantitative and qualitative norms, regulations, guidelines and the corresponding control procedures for the planning and implementation of continuing training activities that are co-financed by State and EU funds.

The Ministry of National Education, Prerequisites and procedures for the foundation and the operation of The Institutes for Vocational Training (IEK), Ministerial Decision Z/3378 of 17 May 1993.

Legal text stating a system of quantitative and qualitative standards and the corresponding verification procedures required for the foundation and operation of an Institute of Vocational Training and for the development of post-secondary initial vocational training courses.