



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Contact

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
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EAEA calls for a new approach to quality in adult learning and education

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This paper was developed by the EAEA Quality Working Group, composed of EAEA members whose work focuses on quality in adult learning and education (ALE). The working group had three online meetings in 2022 in order to discuss the concept of quality in non-formal ALE, and how new policy developments impact quality.

Quality in education and training has always been high on the agenda of the European institutions. Quality assurance in adult learning and education (ALE) can be more challenging than in other sectors – the provision is very fragmented; in many countries it is underfunded and not easily categorised.

With the (possible) introduction or increase of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), the question of quality has become very relevant again. Will there be criteria for organisations / programmes that people can attend through their ILAs? If yes, what will these criteria be?

Quality can be seen from very diverse points of view: it can concern accreditation (either for institutions or programmes), it can concern the quality management systems (ISO and other norm systems, etc.), and it can concern the training and development of teachers and trainers.

In a recently organised online meeting of the Quality Working Group and other EAEA members, participants highlighted:

- In some countries, there is an attempt to transfer quality frameworks or systems of other sectors (mainly CVET and Higher Education) for ALE. EAEA members are concerned that this does not work for ALEs and puts small organisations in particular at a disadvantage due to the high administrative burden and often high costs of quality certification. Sometimes, quality assurance is provided for formal adult education institutions but not non-formal ALE.
- In some cases, quality measures are meant to 'clean the market'. By evaluating quality through very technical criteria, small organisations have difficulties complying with them although they do excellent work with the learners.

EAEA has a number of suggestions and recommendations that should be taken into account so that learners can benefit from high-quality offers in non-formal ALE through their Individual Learning Accounts.



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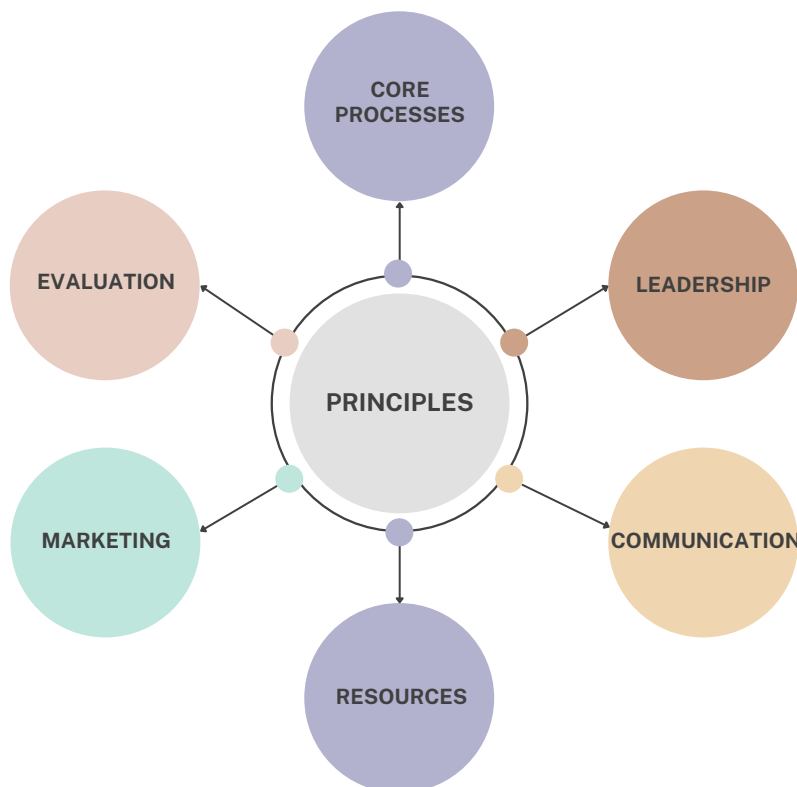
Examples

There have been a number of concepts that have been developed over the last years in order to assure quality in ALE, some at European and others at national levels.

The European Commission ran a **Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning from 2011 to 2013**. The final report (published in October 2013) highlights three key messages of this group:

- Assuring the quality of adult learning provision requires a comprehensive approach that crosses all education and training sectors.
- More systematic evidence-based evaluation of quality approaches and tools in adult learning is needed to inform and enable further development.
- A comprehensive approach to quality assurance in lifelong learning can be best achieved by pursuing three strands of action: – complementing existing resources; – developing and extending existing resources; and – integrating resources into a consistent framework of principles, criteria and guidelines.[1]

Even before this working group took place, EAEA, together with a number of partners, developed a Leonardo Da Vinci project on 'Managing Quality in Adult Education in Europe' in 2006. The project handbook concentrates on seven main areas, which are elaborated in a number of questions that guide through self-assessment in these areas.



[1] https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2013_twg_quality_al_final_report.pdf

[2] <https://kakovost.acs.si/en/publications/2013-01.pdf>

EAEA member Slovenian Institute for Adult Education collected and described quality indicators for ALE[2]. This collection is very holistic and contains many indicators that are important for non-formal ALE organisation. Here is an example:

INDICATOR: REMOVING INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES

Quality standard	Adult education organisation provides support for individual in removing institutional obstacles.
Criteria	The adult education organisation staff is trained to identify institutional obstacles an individual has in connection with education.
	During the initial interviews, the adult education organisation identifies potential institutional obstacles that an individual has in connection with the education, and the teachers and experts also pay attention to them.
	When it identifies institutional obstacles an individual encounters in connection to education, the adult education organisation conducts a personal interview with her or him so they can together weigh potential solutions and how to remove obstacles.
	When it identifies institutional obstacles an individual encounters in connection to education, the adult education organisation tries to find solutions it can influence and implements them.
	Adult education organisation monitors adult with identified institutional obstacles in connection with education, monitors if the obstacles are being or have been removed or is looking for new solutions if they haven't.

Our UK member Learning & Work Institute has created RARPA - Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement - for non-formal adult education[3]. It contains the following steps:



All the examples also comprise cycles for quality evaluation and reviews as well as steps to be taken for future improvement.

[3] <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/rarpa/>

Recommendations

Taking the above-mentioned examples into account, EAEA and its members developed the following recommendations for quality assurance for ALE:

Guiding principle: The Learner is at the centre of all quality

- Quality assurance should be ethical, humanistic and holistic.
- Quality assurance should take the specificities of the adult education sector into account. Small organisations can provide high-quality learning programmes. Self-assessment can be very helpful in these cases.
- Particular attention should be paid to staff development, especially teachers and trainers
- In order to manage quality assurance in adult education, ministries are encouraged to set up guidance and information for institutions, ideally quality advisers who can work with organisations. It is also recommended to set up (online) information and tools that will support anyone working in this area.
- Quality indicators need to be chosen carefully. A too simple indicator might not demonstrate the full quality and impact of the programme. EAEA recommends a bundle of indicators that take different aspects (esp. the learner's) into account.
- Quality cannot be seen as separate from its environment. Infrastructure for high-quality provision needs to be set up so that adult education organisations can do their best. This concerns, for example, the teacher / trainer / staff development, guidance and counselling, a system for the validation of prior learning. Quality for the learner can only be achieved in an enabling context.
- ALE organisations should make sure that the learner is involved in the design of her/his learning programme as much as possible.
- Transparency about quality criteria is necessary for learners and organisations.

About us

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 130 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.



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