



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

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EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE EDUCATION OF
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A European Quality Assurance and Recognition System for education must consider adult learning and education and its diversity

January 2024

EAEA welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System. We are pleased that the [Call for Evidence](#) mentions "educational activities and programmes at all levels" and includes micro-credentials, but are concerned about the overall strong focus on higher education.

Quality assurance is also a key issue in non-formal adult learning and education (ALE). However, quality assurance in ALE can be more difficult than in other sectors, as the provision is very fragmented, underfunded in many countries and not clearly defined in legal terms, as well as not easily categorised among the other education sectors.

With the introduction of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) and micro-credentials across Europe, the issue of quality has become very topical again. Will there be quality criteria for organisations/programmes that people can attend through their ILAs? Will there be any specific quality criteria applied to micro-credentials? If so, what will these criteria look like?

We are concerned that some EU Member States express a clear preference to reserving the awarding of micro-credentials solely for the higher education sector, thereby excluding other sectors such as ALE, contrary to the [European Commission's 2022 proposal](#). ALE is at the core of the implementation of the micro-credentials in Europe:

"Micro-credentials could help certify the outcomes of small, tailored learning experiences. They make possible the targeted, flexible acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences to meet new and emerging needs in society and the labour market and make it possible for individuals to fill the skill gaps they need to succeed in a fast-changing environment, while not replacing traditional qualifications. They can, where appropriate, complement existing qualifications, providing added value while not undermining the core principle of full degree programmes in initial education and training. Micro-credentials could be designed and issued by a variety of providers in different learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal learning settings)."

A European framework for quality assurance in education must, therefore, take into account all education sectors and their specificities - including non-formal adult learning and education - to ensure that important European initiatives such as the ILAs and micro-credentials are implemented across Europe in a way that all groups of the population have access to quality learning.



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What is quality in the context of non-formal adult learning and education?

Quality can be viewed from very different perspectives: It can relate to accreditation (either for institutions or for programmes), it can relate to quality management systems (ISO and other standards systems [1].), and it can relate to the training and development of teachers and trainers.

EAEA members highlight these issues:

- In some countries, attempts are being made to transfer quality frameworks or systems from other sectors (especially vocational education and training and higher education) to ALE. EAEA members are concerned that this does not work for ALE and particularly disadvantages small organisations - which are very typical of the sector - due to the high administrative burden and often high cost of quality certification and accreditation procedures. Sometimes quality assurance is provided for formal adult education organisations, which mainly offer vocational training, but not for non-formal ALE.
- In some cases, the introduction of quality measures is intended to "clean up" the market. As quality is usually assessed against very technical and quantitative criteria, small organisations struggle to meet these, despite doing excellent work with learners and achieving outstanding results. Quality assurance in ALE should, as far as possible, take qualitative data and information - such as self-evaluations of providers and learners [2] as the basis for assessment. The needs of the learners should be at the centre of these processes.
- Quality assurance - if it is taken seriously - is not a matter of a one-off certification and re-certification every x years, but an ongoing process that encompasses all areas of the organisation and teaching and evolves with the development of the organisation. This would require the provision of staff, but this is very difficult due to the precarious funding structures - many organisations work with European project funds - and the associated lack of employees with permanent contracts in the sector. Better financial and structural resources for ALE should therefore *precede* the introduction of quality assurance systems.

[1] see, for instance, ISO 29993:2017 and ISO 21001:2018

[2] see also OECD (2021): Improving the Quality of Non-Formal Adult Learning. Learning from European Best Practices on Quality Assurance. Online: <https://www.oecd.org/skills/improving-the-quality-of-non-formal-adult-learning-f1b450e1-en.htm>



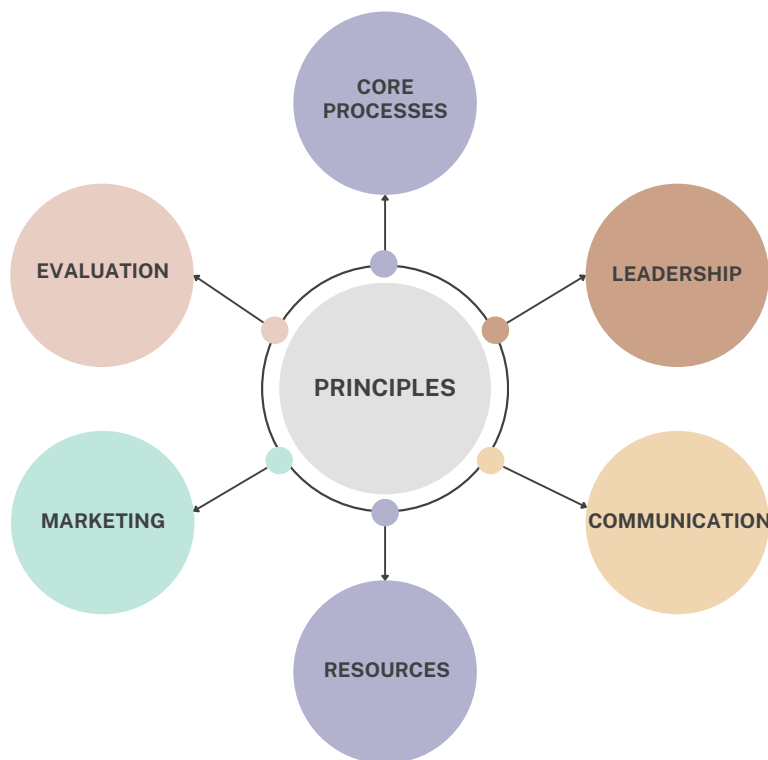
Examples

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.[3]

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.



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



EAEA member Slovenian Institute for Adult Education collected and described quality indicators for ALE[4]. 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[5]. 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.

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

[5] <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 ALE sector into account. Small organisations can provide high-quality learning programmes. Qualitative data through self-assessment and self-evaluation can be very helpful in understanding quality in ALE.
- Particular attention should be paid to staff development, especially the initial and further training of teachers and educators, to ensure long-term quality.
- To manage quality assurance in ALE, ministries are encouraged to set up guidance and information for institutions - ideally, this should be done through quality advisers who 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. An adequate infrastructure - developed through strong ALE systems and financing - is pivotal so that ALE organisations are enabled to deliver high-quality learning courses. This concerns, among others, the teacher/trainer/staff development, guidance and counselling, and a system for the validation of prior learning. Quality for the learner can only be achieved in an enabling context.
- ALE organisations should be enabled to involve the learners in the design of their learning programmes as much as possible to tailor learning to their specific needs.
- Transparency about quality criteria is key for organisations, learners, and potential future learners.

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 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.



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