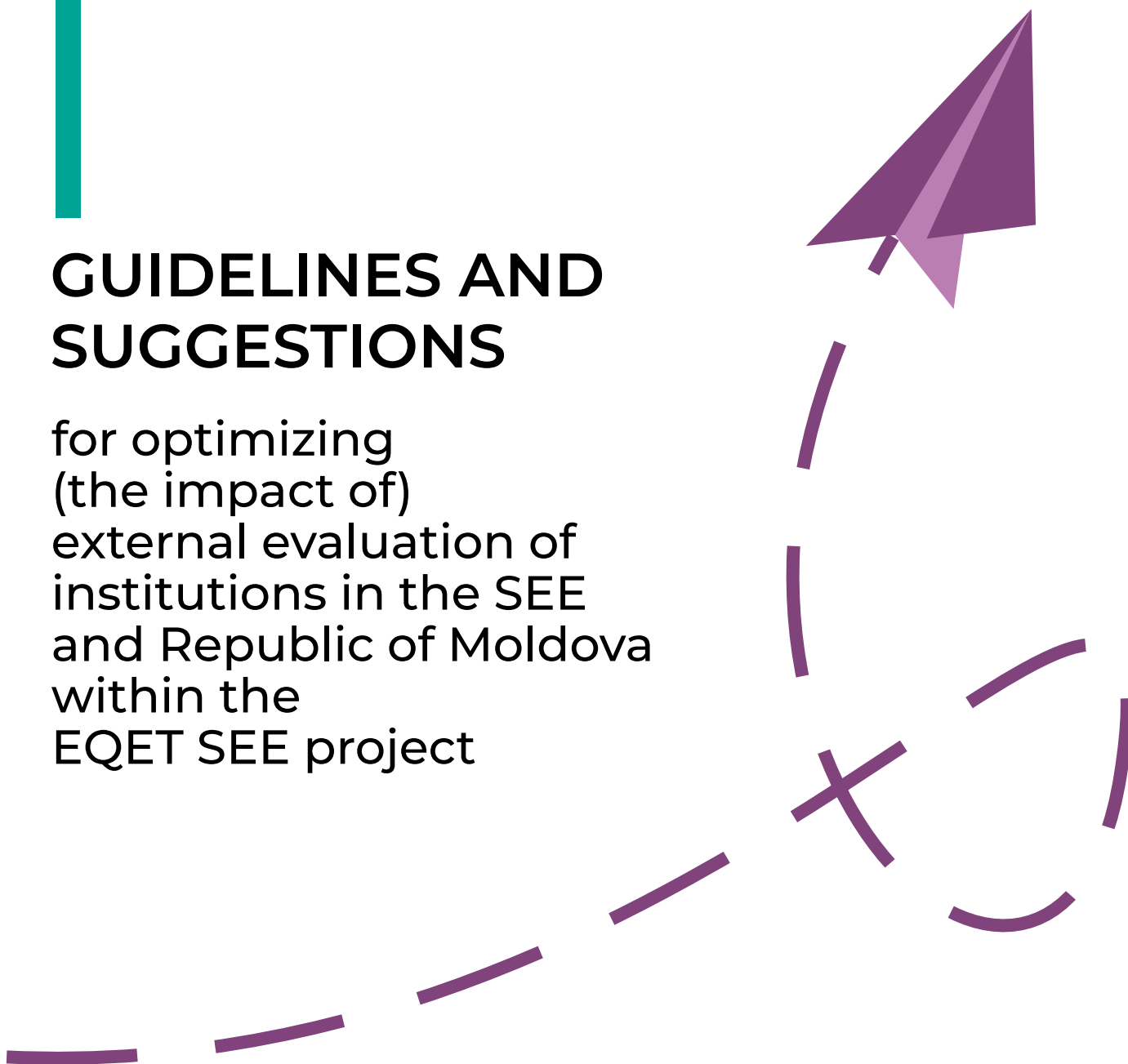


GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

for optimizing
(the impact of)
external evaluation of
institutions in the SEE
and Republic of Moldova
within the
EQET SEE project



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Establishing a common understanding among the institutions in charge of external evaluation of institutions from South Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and the Republic of Moldova, taking part in the EQET SEE project, that in the above-mentioned economies:

- ▶ External evaluation of institutions is an integral part of the quality assurance systems established at pre-tertiary level
- ▶ The institutions in charge of external evaluation of institutions at pre-tertiary level have been established
- ▶ The external evaluation framework and standards have been established and are in use
- ▶ The external evaluation of institutions is closely connected to the internal or self-evaluation of institutions
- ▶ The external evaluation and internal evaluation are crucial elements in supporting the quality culture and quality improvements in education and training systems,

And expressing a common intention that:

- ▶ Quality improvements in the systems of external evaluation of institutions are continuous
- ▶ Peer learning and exchanges present a valuable source of these improvements of systems
- ▶ Throughout the EQET SEE project we shall cooperate to exchange practices and expertise, explore challenges and possible solutions and aim at defining quality improvements
- ▶ As a result, we shall contribute to the developments of the overall quality culture in education and training

**We, the undersigned,
hereby agree that:**

1. Purpose of external evaluation

The external evaluation diagnoses the situation regarding how schools integrate quality standards defined at national level, in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, and needs for support. It results in external evaluation feedback and reports that should be translated into action plans for improvements of schools. They are valuable sources for studies or annual reports by which the whole education system can be influenced. Through external evaluation relevant data is gathered, and good practices recognized. Through these means, external evaluation is to advance the education process and support the development of the quality culture.

The important role of external evaluation is to check compliance with the established regulations, to advise and stimulate institutions in their implementation of quality criteria/standards and to inform and liaise with the policy makers to influence strategic developments.

In the stimulating role, established agencies for quality at pre-tertiary level play a crucial role. Their capacities as supporting actors in the process should constantly be enhanced, as well as their information or liaison role, in their communication with decision makers, schools, principals, teachers, students and parents.

2. Relationship between External evaluation and Internal (self-) evaluation

External evaluation not only influences systems through effective use of results and data, and enhances trust between different stakeholders in the process, but has also proved to be the process that enhances the quality of internal (self-) evaluation.

In all economies, internal (self-) evaluation at pre-tertiary level is regulated by legal frameworks and documents, and in each economy, it is conducted on regular basis. It is based on strategic planning that institutions are conducting in accordance with their capacities.

In the quality assurance process, self-evaluation or internal evaluation process plays an important role – for both internal quality developments of schools, their internal identification of areas of strengths and weaknesses and potential steps ahead, as well as the source of information for external evaluation. Through implementing internal evaluation schools agree to embrace quality developments at school level and take responsibility for their own processes. The greater the influence of self-evaluation on school development, the greater the ownership of the self-evaluation by schools, the more limited external evaluation can be implemented.

In this, the principals play the key role in the process of internal evaluation, establishing quality improvements and preparing the grounds for external evaluation which is seen as a professional, external feedback to school quality and its further development.

Quality assurance agencies stimulate and support overall quality improvements in the internal evaluation, capacities of schools should be increased, where the establishment of cooperation between them in the form of peer learning is seen as an advantage, together with publicizing supporting material such as handbooks, guidelines and similar. Likewise, cooperation between the agencies and schools in development of reports, giving feedback and recommendations is a practice that has been established and should continue to be developed.

3. Supporting the Quality culture

A more partnership and communicative approach between agencies for quality, their external evaluators and schools is seen as an asset to the raising the quality culture in education and training in general.

Enhancing the quality culture can be achieved through various steps, such as, for example: provision of ongoing support and continuous information to schools for internal and external evaluation; increasing the level of school engagement in the process of designing and implementing external evaluation and engaging them as partners;

more supportive approach of external evaluators; raising awareness of the continuous character of cycles of quality improvement; training the school principals (and other staff) in the matter of external evaluation requirements; collaborating with other institutions responsible for quality assurance; raising the numbers of evaluated schools; establishing greater connection/cooperation between self-evaluation and external evaluation; enforcing greater impact of the external evaluation results on the school work; development of new approach based on cooperation and trust; establishing of peer review and peer support to schools.

Having all the above in mind, we hereby agree to the recommendations to be taken into account at regional (multilateral) and unilateral levels within the scope of the EQET SEE project and beyond for the purpose of enhancing quality culture:

1. External evaluation

- ▶ The role of external evaluation should be evaluation, support, and stronger implementation of recommendations by schools. However, it is important to show that the external evaluation system as such is, as well, evaluated, and prone to improvements. The impact of the external evaluation could be measured by collecting feedback from stakeholders and participants in the process. The external evaluation should act as a critical friend to the institution and evaluate processes against minimum quality assurance standards, and enable the reassessment of schools based on previous recommendations.
- ▶ It is recommended to explore which aspects of external evaluation have the most stimulating effect on school improvements, through different ways of data collection and analysis.
- ▶ Quality external evaluators are the key to the quality external evaluation process. The approach and the communication style used have a great influence on the impact of external evaluation on schools. It is recommended to continuously enhance their competencies and skills, including communication, stimulating and motivating skills. Schools should be more involved, as partners, in the external evaluation process. It is recommended to explore further the possibilities of involvement of schools in the external evaluation processes.
- ▶ External evaluation is also seen as a powerful tool for promoting ecological or environmental sustainability and awareness of environmental issues, through the external evaluation frameworks (for example, pre-evaluation questionnaire and sub-indicators of key areas containing questions regarding ecological awareness in curricular or extracurricular activities). It is recommended to review the external evaluation frameworks for these issues and consider possibilities of thematic evaluation on the subject.

- ▶ *The practice of publishing results of external evaluation should be maintained as it serves for greater transparency, for promotion of good practice examples, for supporting peer learning and reducing various disproportionalities or disbalances, such as the one between grammar schools and VET schools. With raising the quality of VET schools reflected in the external evaluation reports, attractiveness of VET schools can be increased, consequently leading to larger number of students choosing VET and having better access to labour market.*

2. External evaluation and internal evaluation

- ▶ *There should be a greater connection between self-evaluation and external evaluation. The use of results of external evaluation for the work of schools should be improved and more integrated at school level. Similarly, the results of self-evaluation should be used by external evaluators to make external evaluation proportional/limited/adjusted to the school situation.*
- ▶ *The external evaluation can have a great impact on how self-evaluation is perceived at school level. It is suggested to consider the self-evaluation as a part of the standards of quality assurance or external evaluation framework. Similarly, external evaluation should strive to rely on the results of self-evaluation and use it for proportionality/adjustment to the scope and frequency of external evaluation.*
- ▶ *To further achieve the embracing of the internal evaluation at school levels, it is suggested to have quality assurance teams formed within the schools responsible for the process, and have them adequately trained based on specific framework regulation. It is recommended to explore possibilities of school staff exchanges during external evaluation visits and peer learning between individuals and the teams for external evaluation at the school level.*
- ▶ *External and internal evaluation can also serve as good mechanisms for ensuring gender balance and neutralizing gender or minority stereotypes. With raising of quality level and developing the consciousness on gender responsible and socially inclusive education, it would be possible to reach improvements in this segment. It is advised to review, at regional level, the standards of quality assurance and external evaluation frameworks for indicators ensuring gender balance and social inclusion and consider possibilities of thematic evaluation.*

3. Use of data

- ▶ *It is recommended that external evaluation at system level provides policy makers with important data and recommendations for continuous improvement of the legal framework in the field and strategic developments. Further peer learning, exchanges and communication on the data and evidence for quality agencies and policy makers, as well on communication strategies, is welcome.*
- ▶ *Emphasis should also be placed on gathering data and evidence and how to use them. External evaluation results in valuable insights on the effectiveness of programmes and curricula – how the programme and curricula are implemented, if the planned learning outcomes are achieved, and on the basis of this further improvement activities can be undertaken.*
- ▶ *External evaluation also gathers numerous data and evidence on the work of teachers and areas of improvement needed, which should be closely related to the provision of continuous professional development. External evaluation should also influence the provision of continuous professional development of teachers. Continuous professional development of teachers in the areas identified as problematic, through the process of external evaluation, should be provided.*
- ▶ *Based on all these data, competent institutions can revise their strategic planning or provision of continuous professional development programmes.*
- ▶ *It is recommended that external evaluation can explore in more depths the connection between education and labour market, through exploring possibilities of tracking students accessing the labour market, with the final goal of collecting feedback from employers regarding their satisfaction level with the students' performance. This can give valuable information on effectiveness of education and training for the labour market. Similarly, higher education levels should also be surveyed on students' performance, to detect what is missing at lower levels of education and training.*

Endorsed by the participants of the Policy vision meeting, held on 12th April 2022 in Podgorica