REGIONAL INTERNAL QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONS IN CHARGE OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION IN PRE-TERTIARY EDUCATION

ERI SEE Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe

EQET SEE

Austrian Development Cooperation

Contents

INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of the document

Regional internal quality guidelines for institutions in charge of external evaluation in pre-tertiary education (the Guidelines) were developed as a final output of the Quality Assurance (QA) Component within the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) Project. This project, led by the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and funded by the Austrian Development Agency with support from Austrian Development Cooperation, brought together QA agencies from seven economies— Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia —to collaboratively advance the practices of external evaluation of schools across the region.

The purpose of the Guidelines is twofold: first, it serves as a compilation of outputs achieved during the implementation of the EQET SEE project, putting all of them into a clear context, describing in brief the process through which they were developed, and offering different examples of their further use in national contexts and institutions in charge of external evaluation. The other purpose of the Guidelines is to offer the brief overview of 2 quality management standards and tools – the first one being ISO standards, probably the most commonly known; and the other being the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), a free tool developed by the European Commission to assist public-sector organizations across Europe in using quality management techniques to improve their performance. In addition to introducing these standards and tools, these Guidelines offer an overview of possible ways of their step-by-step introduction into the organizations.

Among these Guidelines, you will find the wide span of EQET SEE results - from standards of competences for external evaluators, training needs assessment tool, 360-degree feedback mechanism, recommendations on how to use these in the everyday operations of institutions such as recruitment, continuous professional development, evaluation of staff etc. and recommendations on how to introduce quality management standards and tools. Another important characteristic of these Guidelines is that they include the regional – South Eastern European and Moldovan perspectives, combined with national specificities and international standards.

2. Scope and application

The Regional internal quality guidelines for institutions in charge of external evaluation in pre-tertiary education across South Eastern Europe and Republic of Moldova are intended to support actors responsible for ensuring the quality of educational provision by establishing uniform standards and practices that can be adapted to varying national contexts within the region.

Primarily, the Guidelines are applicable to ministries and QA agencies dealing with external evaluation in the seven participating economies— Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia — that are in-

volved in the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) Project. However, the structure and recommendations within the Guidelines are designed to be adaptable and can be used by other institutions within the broader educational sector, particularly those seeking to adopt standardized methods for evaluating educational quality and external evaluation practices.

The document is intended for use in contexts where QA actors involved in external evaluation are responsible for recruiting, training, and assessing external evaluators. It serves as a framework for enhancing quality management processes, implementing competence standards, conducting competence assessments, and addressing environmental, social, and gender concerns in quality assurance practices. While the Guidelines offer a comprehensive foundation, they are not exhaustive; agencies are encouraged to adapt and build on them as necessary to meet specific institutional or national requirements.

3. Background and Context

The Regional internal quality guidelines for institutions in charge of external evaluation in pre-tertiary education were developed to address the need for standardized quality assurance practices in schools across South Eastern Europe.

Currently, the state of quality assurance in the region shows different levels of development among QA actors involved in external evaluation. Some institutions have made progress in their evaluation processes, while others still face significant challenges. The Guidelines aim to enhance the competence of external evaluators by providing clear standards for recruitment, training, and assessment. This helps ensure that evaluators are well-prepared to carry out their responsibilities, ultimately contributing to improved educational quality across South Eastern Europe.

The development of the Guidelines was informed by international standards and best practices, including ISO quality management standards and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). These frameworks offer insights into effective quality management processes, allowing QA actors involved in external evaluation to implement structured and transparent evaluation practices.

A supporting document for the development of these Guidelines was the *Guidelines and suggestions for optimizing (the impact of) external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Republic of Moldova*, formulated within the EQET SEE project. This document represents the consensus of stakeholders from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia on the goals and methods of external evaluation in the region. Developed through consultations among relevant stakeholders, the document provides regional conclusions on the purpose of external evaluation in the SEE region and Moldova, relationship between external evaluation and internal (self-) evaluation, improvements of external evaluation needed for enhancement of quality culture, as well as the recommendations to be taken into account at regional national level within the scope of EQET SEE project to reach this vision. The main conclusions of this document are as follows:

- External evaluation is a vital component of quality assurance systems at the pre-tertiary level, complementing internal evaluations to foster a culture of continuous improvement.
- Peer learning, stakeholder engagement, and regional cooperation enhance the effectiveness and impact of external evaluation systems.

- Continuous professional development and improved communication skills for evaluators are key to impactful external evaluation processes.
- External evaluation provides valuable insights for evidence-based policymaking, strategic planning, and curriculum enhancements, while supporting connections between education and labor market needs.
- External evaluations should integrate environmental sustainability and social inclusion, ensuring equity, gender balance, and environmental awareness in educational practices.

Another important resource is the publication *Good European Practices in the Implementation of External Evaluation Methodologies*, which compiles over 70 examples of external evaluation practices from South Eastern Europe, Republic of Moldova, and EU countries. This publication, developed in collaboration with over 20 institutions, offers a wide range of methodological approaches and practical insights. It serves as a valuable tool for QA actors involved in external evaluation seeking to adopt innovative practices and refine their approaches to external evaluation.

Annexes:

Annex 1. Guidelines and Suggestions for optimizing the impact of external evaluation of institutions in the SEE and Republic of Moldova

Annex 2. Good European Practices in the Implementation of External Evaluation Methodologies

QUALITY MANAGMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES IN PRE-TERTIARY EDUCATION

1. Importance of quality management (QM) in public sector organizations and education sector

The evolution of quality thinking traces back to the post-war period of industrialization and the advent of mass production. Initially, quality efforts focused primarily on output, with a strong emphasis on product-centric inspection and control. Over time, this focus expanded to include processes and ensuring quality throughout production (quality assurance), eventually leading to the concept of Quality Management (QM) and Total Quality Management (TQM)[1].

QM marked a shift toward a user-oriented perspective, emphasizing the impact of products and services on the end user. Customer/user/citizens satisfaction emerged as a central concept. QM is defined by the ongoing commitment to mobilizing all organizational resources, particularly people, to continuously improve every aspect of the organization. This includes the quality of goods and services provided, the satisfaction of all stakeholders, including employees, and the organization's integration into its broader environment. The ultimate aim of QM is to meet and exceed customer expectations.

Achieving QM and TQM requires active engagement from all employees and strong commitment by the leadership for the implementation of robust information systems to gather and process data related to customers, suppliers, and internal processes across the organization. In the sphere of QM, cultural transformation, learning and innovation within an organization are sustained principles and practices. Alongside of these, benchmarking, excellence recognition (such as public sector awards) are contributing to the promotion of quality thinking in the public sector.

Specifically in education, (T)QM focuses on systematically improving educational processes to enhance learning outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness. It involves setting clear objectives, measuring performance, and continuously refining practices to meet the needs of students, parents, educators, and the community. TQM approaches like the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the International Standard Organisation (ISO) approaches in Education emphasize collaboration, self-assessment[2], and alignment with broader educational priorities, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Fact-based decision making and the orientation to exceed the expectations from the external actors, whilst having a high employee (people) satisfaction rate, are one of the most important pillars of the QM approaches.

Ultimately, quality management in the educational sector aims to create inclusive, equitable, and high-performing educational environments that adapt to changing societal and learner needs.

The application of QM can be considered the cornerstone of reforms in public administration or the educational sector. By using QM standards/models, public organizations are prepared to im-

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1 Total Quality Management (TQM) is a holistic approach to organizational management that focuses on continuously improving all aspects of operations to meet and exceed customer expectations. It involves the active engagement of all employees, efficient processes, and robust information systems to enhance the quality of products, services, and stakeholder satisfaction. TQM emphasizes a culture of continuous improvement and integration with the broader environment.

2 Refers only to the CAF, as a self-assessment TQM model.

plement sectoral or supranational reforms as improved, competent organizations that strive for excellence in effectiveness and efficiency, both underpinned by QM.

In this chapter, the focus will be in giving basic information about the ratio, objectives, benefits (including challenges) and implementation steps for two most commonly used quality management approaches: the standards from the International Standard Organization (ISO) family and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)- a TQM tailor-made for the public sector.

2. Quality management models for public organizations and educational sector (ISO and CAF) and how to apply them

The pressure and demand for quality education are increasing; hence, educational institutions are increasingly considering applying Total Quality Management (TQM) in education. The approach goes in a two-way direction: On one end, the educational institutions, such as quality assurance institutions need to have structured and efficient, process-and results-oriented working procedures in place. On the other end, they also need to lead by example in setting high-quality profiles and inspire schools and universities to apply the same approach as well.

Many organizations choose to implement the **ISO** quality management standard, aiming to improve their entire operational performance by implementing and promoting the specifications that the standard conveys about continuous improvement and risk-based thinking and adopting a process approach.

When applying QM approaches, organizations can receive a certificate/external feedback that proves their achievement of excellence level, ISO 9001, with external audits; the CAF external feedback procedure by peers and experts can result in acquiring the excellence recognition.

2.1. ISO – characteristics, benefits and recommended phases for application

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO)[3] is a global body that develops and publishes standards to ensure the quality, safety, efficiency, and reliability of products, services, and systems. ISO standards are recognized worldwide and are designed to promote uniformity and continuous improvement across various sectors, organizations and industries. They offer frameworks that organizations from the private and public sector can adapt to meet specific needs, while fostering customer satisfaction and operational excellence. ISO's principles, including risk-based thinking, stakeholder involvement, and a focus on continual improvement, make its standards adaptable and relevant across industries, including education.

One of the most widely used standards is ISO 9001[4], which sets requirements for quality management systems (QMS) applicable to any organization.

ISO requirements refer to the specific standards and guidelines an organization must follow to meet compliance with a particular ISO standard. These requirements are designed to help organizations establish consistent processes, ensure quality, and continuously improve. The exact requirements depend on the specific ISO standard (e.g., ISO 9001 for Quality Management Systems, ISO 14001 for Environmental Management Systems, ISO 45001 for Occupational Health and Safety, etc.). Here's a general outline of ISO requirements using **ISO 9001:2015 (Quality Management System)** as an example:

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3 https://www.iso.org/home.html
4 https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html

1. Context of the organization (Clause 4)

- Understand the internal and external factors that affect the organization's ability to achieve desired outcomes.
- Identify interested parties (e.g., customers, employees, suppliers) and their needs.
- Define the scope of the management system, including boundaries and applicability.

2. Leadership (Clause 5)

- Demonstrate top management's commitment to the management system.
- Develop and communicate a **quality policy** aligned with the organization's goals.
- Assign clear roles, responsibilities, and authorities within the organization.

3. Planning (Clause 6)

- Identify and address risks and opportunities that could impact objectives.
- Set quality objectives that are measurable and align with the quality policy.
- Plan changes systematically to ensure that the quality management system remains effective.

4. Support (Clause 7)

- Ensure sufficient resources (people, infrastructure, and environment) are available.
- Provide training to ensure employees are competent for their roles.
- Maintain documented information, such as procedures, policies, and records.

5. Operation (Clause 8)

- Plan and control processes needed to deliver products or services.
- Establish criteria for accepting products or services.
- Manage external providers (e.g., suppliers) to ensure consistency and quality.
- Implement systems for controlling and responding to nonconforming outputs.

- **6. Performance evaluation** (Clause 9)
- Monitor, measure, analyse, and evaluate the performance of processes and the quality management system.
- Conduct internal audits to ensure the system complies with ISO requirements and is effectively implemented.
- Hold management reviews to evaluate the system's performance and alignment with organizational goals.

7. Improvement (Clause 10)

- Take corrective actions to address nonconformities.
- Focus on continuous improvement of processes, products, and services.
- Use data and feedback (from customers, audits, etc.) to enhance the system.

As mentioned above, in the educational sector, ISO 21001:2018[5] provides a tailored framework for educational organizations, focusing on enhancing satisfaction among learners and stakeholders by improving processes, governance, and the delivery of educational services.

Benefits of ISO Implementation are manifold. These include enhanced organizational efficiency, improved quality of services, increased stakeholder satisfaction, and strengthened credibility in the marketplace. ISO certification demonstrates an organization's commitment to quality and continuous improvement, which can result in a competitive edge. For educational organizations, adopting standards like ISO 21001 ensures alignment with learners' needs, promotes inclusion, and supports equitable access to quality education.

However, the costs associated with ISO certification can pose challenges for many organizations, particularly smaller institutions with limited budgets. These include expenses for initial certification audits, recurring surveillance audits, and recertification every three years. Additionally, the need for staff training, process adjustments, and documentation updates can further strain resources, making it essential for organizations to plan effectively for these financial and operational demands.

To ensure successful ISO implementation, organizations can follow these recommended phases:

1. **Leadership commitment:** the full commitment needs to be in place for all phases of the ISO introduction, including the maintenance of the quality over the time. The leadership needs to be fully informed and lead by example, especially in monitoring and promoting the (T)QM orientation.
2. **Purchasing the standard:** contacting the Standardization Institute in the respective country will provide the institution representatives not only with the standard but also other valuable information on the ISO introduction and maintenance.
3. **Gap analysis**: Assess existing processes and systems against the requirements of the chosen ISO standard to identify gaps and improvement areas.
4. **Planning**: Develop a clear roadmap for implementation, including resource allocation, timelines, and assigning responsibilities.
5. **Documentation**: Establish or update policies, procedures, and records to comply with ISO requirements. ISO requirements focus on building a structured system where **policies** guide the organization (its vision, mission and way of contributing to the continuous improvement), **procedures** define how to achieve these policies, and **records** (documents of evidence) provide information of compliance and continuous improvement. By clearly assigning responsibilities in the workflows, documenting workflows, and maintaining evidence, an organization ensures transparency, accountability, and consistency across its operations. This step ensures consistency and provides a solid foundation for audits.
6. **Training, awareness**: Educate employees and stakeholders, and clearly inform them about the purpose of ISO standards and their roles in achieving compliance and long-term effectiveness.

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5 https://www.iso.org/standard/66266.html

7. **Implementation**: Execute the planned changes and integrate them into the organization's daily operations.

8. **Internal audits**: Conduct internal evaluations to monitor compliance and address any non-conformities ahead of the external audit.

9. **Certification audit**: Engage an accredited certification body to perform the formal audit and issue certification upon successful compliance.

The process of ISO certification, while resource-intensive, fosters long-term value by embedding a culture of quality and improvement within the organization. By following these structured phases, organizations can not only achieve compliance but also create a sustainable framework for innovation, stakeholder satisfaction, and operational excellence.

2. 2. CAF – characteristics, benefits and recommended phases of implementation

Common Assessment Framework- CAF is a European self-assessment TQM model based on the premise that each public organization has to achieve excellent results for the benefit of customers, citizens, and society. To achieve such impact and results, the organization boosts mutually connected enablers. In this process, the organization embeds continuous learning, innovation and improvement. CAF, as a tailor made, TQM model for public organizations is available for public educational institutions with the CAF 2020 Model[6] that can be followed with well-developed examples of good governance to guide the organization to position itself through self-assessment. The model is freely accessible in all SEE languages on the above mentioned site of the European CAF Resource Centre, including Romanian as the recently translated model, due to increased interest in CAF in Moldova.

A number of educational institutions across Europe have been using CAF- the database on CAF applications is available in EIPA CAF Resource Centre on EIPA website,[7] allowing the integration of good practices in public administrations from all over Europe and beyond.

In the Western Balkans, ReSPA[8] is hosting the Regional Quality Management Centre and can offer significant support for CAF implementation and free-of-charge CAF External Feedback Procedure (PEF) (external evaluation of applied CAF) that can result in obtaining the prestigious European CAF Effective User Label[9]. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have appointed their national CAF correspondents who are representing the countries on the European level and are CAF ambassadors in their respective countries.

The **CAF** model offers significant **benefits** by providing a comprehensive, user-friendly TQM model for self-assessment and continuous improvement in public sector organizations. By defining the starting position and revealing potential and concrete measures for improvement, CAF boosts an organization's overall performance. The result is increased efficiency, transparency, and service delivery with a focus on bigger stakeholder engagement and promoted a culture of collaboration.

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6 https://www.eipa.eu/caf-resource-centre/

7 https://www.eipa.eu/caf-resource-centre/caf-users/?utm_source=page+-about+CAF&utm_medium=website&ad_sid=3871137158

8 Regional School for Public administration https://www.respaweb.eu/77/pages/10/rqmc

9 CAF Excellence Recognition certificate as the new, enhanced model of CAF Effective User label, to be in us as of mid 2024

By diagnosing the present state and proposing actions for improvement, CAF can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of delivering services in all education institutions, be they external evaluation agencies or schools. If applied in an external evaluation agency, CAF would provide insight into the level of feedback between the agency and its users and provide answers on whether and how it can be strengthened. Its application would result in greater compliance with its stakeholders' needs and building even more beneficial relationships. More efficient external evaluations
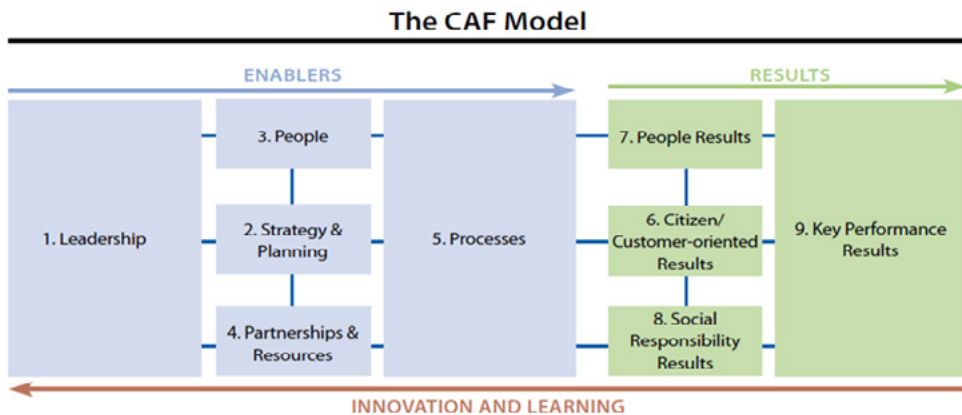
Picture 1: The CAF Model, enablers, results within 9 criteria**.**

CAF model captures all aspects of an organization with nine CAF criteria covering five enablers and four results that will be the subject of organizational self-analysis. Five Enablers criteria (1. Leadership 2. Strategy and planning 3. People 4. Partnerships and Resources 5. Processes) refer to what any organization does and how it approaches its enablers to achieve desired results. In criteria 6-9, (6. Citizen and customers-oriented results, 7. People results, 8. Social responsibility results, and 9. Key performance results) results are measured by perception measurements, and internal indicators are evaluated.

Each of the nine criteria is further broken down into a list of 28 sub-criteria/main issues**.**[10] For each

10 Criteria and sub-criteria: (1) Leadership: 1.1 Provide direction for the organization by developing its mission, vision, and values 1.2 Manage the organization, its performance, and continuous improvement 1.3. Inspire, motivate, and support the people in the organisation and act as a role model. 1.4. Manage effective relations with political authorities and other stakeholders. (2) Strategy and Planning: 2.1. Identify the needs and expectations of stakeholders, the external environment, and the relevant management information 2.2. Develop strategies and plans based on gathered information 2.3. Communicate, implement and review strategies and plans 2.4. Manage change and innovation to ensure the agility and resilience of the organization (3) People: 3.1. Manage and improve human resources to support the strategy of the organization 3.2. Develop and manage the competences of people 3.3. Involve and empower the people and support their well-being (4)Partnerships and Resources: 4.1. Develop and manage partnerships with relevant organizations 4.2. Collaborate with citizens and civil society organizations 4.3. Manage finances 4.4.manage information and knowledge 4.5.manage facilities (5) Processes: 5.1. Design and manage processes to increase value for citizens and customers 5.2. Deliver products and services for customers, citizens, stakeholders and society 5.3. Coordinate processes across the organization and with other relevant organizations (6)Citizen/customer-oriented results: 6.1.Percetion measurements 6.2. Performance measurements (7) People results: 7.1. Perception measurements 7.2.Performance measurements (8)Social Responsibility results: 8.1. Performance measurements 8.2.Performance measurements (9)Key performance results: 9.1. External results, outputs, and public value 9.2.Internal results: level of efficiency

sub-criteria, CAF 2020 provides examples/questions as examples of good governance that suggest areas that might be addressed. The recommendation of the CAF 2020 is not to start the self-assessment by using the generic approach of the examples (which are to be as inspiration, not mandatory to be assessed), but to adjust the examples on the level of sub-criteria to the nature and mandate of the organization. Having a set of a number of adjusted examples, each organization can quite easily answer, through an anonymous individual self-assessment, of their strengths (with evidence) and areas of improvement in the present moment and propose the actions for improvement, ultimately providing a number of applicable improvement actions/ideas for the next two years. Consensus is achieved on relevant statements of strengths, areas for improvement, and action for improvement (Consensus workshop). The list of, by consensus, agreed actions for improvement is the basis for prioritization and setting up of Improvement action plan ultimately providing the list of applicable improvement actions (Improvement Action Plan workshop) for two years.

In order to make CAF more practicable and easier to use for the respondents during the self-assessment, it is highly recommended that the examples be adjusted and customized to the specific mandate, culture, and "language" of the organization. For an external evaluation agency, the adjustments can be done as in the examples below.

CAF 2020 - Examples in sub-criterion 3.1

Criterion 3: People
Subcriterion 3.1 Manage and improve human resources to support the strategy of the organization
Examples,: a,b,c,d,e.

a	*Analyse current and future human resource needs in line with the strategy of the organisation.*
b	*Develop and implement a transparent HR policy based on objective criteria for recruitment, promotion, remuneration, development, delegation, responsibilities, rewards and the assignment of managerial functions, in accordance with the organisation's HR principles.*
c	*Implement the principles of fairness, political neutrality, merit based, equal opportunities, diversity, social responsibility and work–life balance in the HR policy and review the necessity for promoting women's careers and develop plans accordingly.*
d	*Ensure the necessary competences and capabilities to achieve the mission, vision and values of the organisation are in place, especially focusing on social skills, agile mindset, and digital and innovation skills.*
e	*Support a performance culture by defining performance goals shared with the people and monitoring the performance systematically, and conducting performance dialogues with the people.*

When working with examples, they can be rephrased into answers starting with "Does the organization..."

For an external evaluation agency, the example d) from the table above can be rephrased with minimal adjustment from:

„Ensure the necessary competences and capabilities to achieve the mission, vision and values of the organisation are in place, especially focusing on social skills, agile mindset, and digital and innovation skills"

to:

(Does the external evaluation agency) " Ensure the necessary competences and capabilities to achieve the mission, vision, and values of the organization to be in place, especially focusing on social skills, agile mindset, and digital and innovation skills. "

Other sub criteria examples might require more adjustment, as in the following example:

Criterion 2: Strategy and Planning

Sub criterion 2.1.: Identify the needs and expectations of the stakeholders, the external environment and the relevant management information

Examples,: a,b,c,d,e.

a	*Observe and analyse the external environment regularly including legal, political, demographic change and digitalisation, as well as global factors like climate change as inputs for strategies and plans.*
b	*Identify all relevant stakeholders and analyse information about their current and future needs, expectations and satisfaction.*
c	*Analyse public sector reforms, at national and European level, to define and review effective strategies*
d	*Analyse the performance and capability of the organization, focusing on internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/risks.*

Example a.:

"Observe and analyse the external environment regularly including legal, political, demographic change and digitalisation, as well as global factors like climate change as inputs for strategies and plans. "

could be adjusted for the external evaluation agency to:

"Be informed and analyse the changes relevant to the agency's work domain (e.g., legal, educational reform, demographic changes related to age group 6-14, digitalization in the educational sector) and include the relevant changes in the strategy and annual plan."

Example d.:

"Analyse the performance and capability of the organization, focusing on internal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/risks."

could be adjusted for the external evaluation agency as:

"Do the SWOT analysis before drafting the annual plan and make it an integral part-".

The CAF, is recommending the following **steps within four key stages to be followed** when implementing and maintaining the improvement actions:

1. Initiation and leadership commitment (with CAF Training)

- **Obtain leadership commitment**: Secure buy-in from top management to support the CAF process and choose your organization's most appropriate CAF model (e.g., CAF 2020 or CAF Education).

- **Form a CAF self-assessment team**: Establish a dedicated team to give opinions on strengths and improvements, including representatives from various organizational levels. Appoint a CAF Team with preferably two persons (Project Leader/CAF Manager and Secretary) with clear roles. CAF Project Leader coordinates all activities and is crucial in adjusting CAF examples to its organisation. Make a decision if an external CAF facilitator is needed (especially during the first time of CAF implementation).

- **Plan the process**: Develop a project roadmap for implementation (timelines).

- **Adjust the examples in the sub-criteria**: there are around 200 examples in the CAF 2020 Model with the aim to facilitate the self-assessment. Before diving into the self-assessment process, preferably using an E tool, the examples shall be adapted for the specific organisation and redundancies on the sub-criteria level shall be avoided.

- **Conduct a CAF training for the self-assessment group:** inform the Self Assessment Group (SAG) about the nature, scope, objectives, methodology, e Tool if applicable, roles and responsibilities.

2. **Self-assessment (individual self-assessment and Consensus Workshop)**

- **Conduct the individual self-assessment**: The individual self-assessment of SAG using the adjusted examples starts and is scheduled to last between 4-6 weeks. Each SAG member answers the CAF Questionnaire based on their own knowledge and work experience, providing the answers to the questions:

- What are our strengths, and where are we good at?

- Which improvement areas exist?

- What improvement actions can be proposed and implemented?

- A score is done using the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) scoring table for enablers by choosing the level that is assessed to be reached among the PDCA phases. The results are scored according to the perceived trend in progress. The overall results are collected and transmitted to the Consensus workshop.

- **Conduct a consensus-workshop**: consensus is reached among the group members on all criteria, sub-criteria and scoring. A self-assessment report is being developed and submitted to the management, as the basis for the prioritisation.

3. Improvement plan (with Improvement Action Plan workshop)

- **Prioritisation workshop/Improvement Action plan workshop:** This is the time for the management to make decisions based on a participatory discussion with the self-assessment group members and other managers in the organisation. The identified improvement opportunities are ranked based on their strategic impact and feasibility.

- **Develop an Improvement plan with prioritised actions**: Create a concrete plan with specif-

ic actions, timelines, responsibilities, and expected outcomes, allocate resources.

- **Execute the plan**: Implement the prioritized actions within the set timeframe. Track the implementation and address any challenges or delays (monitoring)

4-Evaluation and Feedback

- **Measure Results**: Evaluate the impact of the implemented improvements using relevant performance indicators.
- **Gather Feedback**: Collect input from staff and stakeholders to assess the success of the process.
- **Adjust as Needed**: Refine the improvement actions based on feedback and outcomes.
- **Engage in External Feedback**: Consider applying for the CAF External Feedback Procedure (PEF) to validate results and receive additional insights.

The organisation can connect with other organizations in the CAF network to share best practices and experiences and engage in conferences, workshops, and forums to deepen understanding and collaboration.

2. 3. CAF in Education

CAF in Education[11] emerged as a sector-specific adaptation, tailored for educational institutions at all levels, from pre-school to higher education and lifelong learning.

The journey of CAF in Education began with the release of its first version in 2011, followed by an improved 2013 edition. With the introduction of CAF 2020, further updates became necessary to align with new priorities and methodologies. Spearheaded by the Portuguese EU Presidency in 2021 and supported by the CAF National Correspondents Working Group and the European CAF Resource Centre, the CAF Education 2024 revision was developed. This updated version integrates the principles of Whole Child Development, the European Qualifications Framework, and European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, emphasizing holistic educational excellence.

The CAF in Education is a tailored TQM model designed specifically for the educational sector[12]. CAF in Education aligns the priorities of educational institutions with broader European goals, such as inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability, while also addressing the specific needs of learners, educators, and stakeholders. Unlike other quality management tools, CAF encourages active engagement from all employees and stakeholders, fostering a shared commitment to quality and institutional growth.

The benefits of CAF in Education are extensive. By promoting a culture of self-reflection, it enables educational institutions to identify strengths and areas for improvement systematically. The use of the CAF in Education will boost digitalization, change management and the better delivery and design of the curricula. The enhanced decision-making in the educational sector, along with aligning the organizational practices with educational objectives on local, national and international levels will lead to a systematical increase of the stakeholder satisfaction. On

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11 https://www.eipa.eu/caf-resource-centre/caf-library/
    Notice as of 09.12.2024: The CAF in Education has been updated in 2024. The new model shall be soon published on the website of the European CAF Resource Centre.
12 Example of a CAF in Education implementation:
    https://www.kdz.eu/sites/default/files/2021-02/CAF-Conference%2017%20Feb_ISCSP.pdf

the level of internal improvements, bridging communication gaps among the stakeholders (management, teachers, students) gaining new perspectives about the organizational objectives and the needs of the users, performance management and result-orientation are some of the most visible and tangible benefits. Additionally, CAF in Education encourages collaboration between educational institutions, creating a network of best practices that fosters innovation and supports continuous improvement. By registering to the CAF users database in the European CAF Resource Centre, the CAF in Education users can reach out to other users and exchange on the benefits, new ideas and challenges as well. In addition, joining the CAF events and presenting inspirative practices is not only promoting the institution as a TQM user, but it also contributes to the overall strengthening and updating of the CAF model, the guidelines and subsequently, the network of practitioners.

REGIONAL STANDARD OF COMPETENCES FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

1. Role and Purpose of Regional Standard of Competences

The creation of the **Regional Standard of Competences** was a collaborative effort involving representatives from seven economies in the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. The result is a regional standard that was adapted to national requirements and needs, and integrated into each economy's national system, ensuring that external evaluators meet the same core standards across borders.

The significance of this collaborative development lies in its ability to provide a shared foundation for external evaluators, regardless of their location. This standard allows for cross-country cooperation and comparison while still being flexible enough to accommodate national differences when implemented at the local level. It ensures that evaluators are not only equipped with the competences necessary to perform their roles but also that they are aligned with broader educational goals, including inclusivity, social responsibility, and continuous improvement.

The Standard of Competence for external evaluators plays an important role in ensuring the consistent quality and reliability of external evaluators in their performance. These competences define the essential knowledge, skills, and behaviors that evaluators need in order to carry out their work effectively. By providing a clear framework, the Standard helps evaluators understand what is expected of them, which enables them to perform their duties consistently across various educational institutions.

In that sense, this Standard serves multiple functions in guiding the recruitment, training, and professional development of external evaluators:

- *Identifying core competences in recruitment*: Certain competences within this Standard are fundamental for applicants aspiring to become external evaluators. These baseline skills and attributes form the foundation of the recruitment process, ensuring that candidates are well-equipped to begin their roles effectively.
- *Framework for continuous development*: Some competences are not static but require ongoing development. The standard, therefore, functions as a roadmap for the continuous professional growth of external evaluators, particularly through structured training programmes designed to expand and deepen their expertise.
- *Tool for Assessing Training Needs:* The standard can be employed by quality assurance agencies to assess whether evaluators require initial training or further Continuous Professional Development (CPD). By identifying areas where competences may be lacking or could be enhanced, agencies can tailor training programmes to meet the evaluators' needs effectively.
- *Basis for performance evaluation*: As a set of criteria, the standard provides an objective measure for evaluating the performance of external evaluators. This approach supports consistent and fair assessments, ensuring that evaluators meet professional standards in their evaluations.

- *Resource for workforce planning*: For educational institutions, the standard assists in defining competency requirements when hiring new evaluators, structuring job descriptions, and organizing workforce roles effectively. This ensures that the right skills are prioritized, fostering a competent and prepared evaluation workforce.

In this way, the Regional Standard of Competences provides a structured and holistic approach to managing the competences of external evaluators, ultimately contributing to a high-quality, reliable evaluation system across the participating economies.

2. Development of Standard of Competences within the EQET SEE Project

The development of the **Regional Standard of Competences for External Evaluators** within the EQET SEE project was a **comprehensive and collaborative effort** involving representatives from seven economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia, as mentioned before. This initiative aimed to create a unified framework that addresses the varied educational contexts of each participating economy while promoting consistent quality in external evaluations. By prioritizing collaboration, adaptability, and alignment with contemporary educational principles, the development process ensures that this standard not only strengthens the quality of external evaluations but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth among evaluators throughout the region.

The principles of environment, social responsibility, and gender equity (ESG principles) were integral to the discussions. By integrating these principles, the standard not only focus on the competences of external evaluators required for effective evaluation but also emphasize the importance of inclusivity and social responsibility, as well as environmental aspects, within the educational and external evaluation national frameworks.

The Regional Standard of Competences for external evaluators defines a comprehensive framework outlining the essential qualifications and requirements for evaluators in the educational context.

Different segments of the RSC define different knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant for the specific segment, that characterize competent evaluators.

Specifically, the framework delineates several domains of competence. The first domain focuses on **core competences** that underpin the role of evaluators, establishing what distinguishes them from other educational professionals. The second domain emphasizes **professional practice in external evaluation**, highlighting the **unique skills and approaches** evaluators must employ. **Interpersonal communication skills** form the third domain, recognizing the importance of effective human relations and social interactions in fostering evaluator effectiveness throughout all stages of the evaluation process. The fourth domain addresses the **methodology of evaluation**, stressing the significance of evidence-based, systematic inquiry to achieve valuable outcomes. **Leadership and management skills** constitute the fifth domain, underscoring the need for evaluators to effectively manage work plans, timelines, and resources to ensure the successful completion of evaluations. Finally, the sixth domain focuses on **understanding the contextual factors that influence evaluations**, recognizing the diverse circumstances and perspectives of stakeholders involved. Lastly, the framework includes a **cross-cutting awareness domain**, which integrates environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and gender equity as valuable considerations for evaluators.

These defined competences are essential for ensuring that external evaluators can carry out their roles effectively and consistently across different educational settings.

3. National Adjustments of Regional Standard of Competences

The Regional Standard of Competences (RSC) for External Evaluators, developed within the EQET SEE project, provides a cohesive framework for ensuring the quality and professionalism of evaluators across the participating economies. However, implementing the RSC at the national level requires adjustments to accommodate the unique regulatory, cultural, and educational contexts of each economy.

Each participating country has thus adapted the RSC to meet its own national requirements while preserving the core competences established at the regional level. This balance between standardization and customization ensures that external evaluators uphold consistent quality benchmarks while effectively addressing specific national needs.

National adjustments to the RSC include the following aspects:

- While the core competences outlined in the RSC remain consistent, each country has the flexibility to interpret them in alignment with its local educational policies and institutional structures.
- National agencies harmonize the RSC with their existing evaluation frameworks, incorporating any necessary procedural or methodological modifications.
- Adjustments also consider the national priorities related to inclusivity, social responsibility, and environmental sustainability, ensuring that these values are reflected in the practices of external evaluators.

By customizing the RSC at the national level, economies participating in the EQET SEE project are able to utilize a common standard that promotes excellence and comparability across borders yet retains the flexibility to support effective implementation within their distinct educational environments.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Regional standard of competences for external evaluators in English
Annex 2. National standard of competences for external evaluators in Serbia
National standard of competences for external evaluators in Albania
National standard of competences for external evaluators in Moldova
National standard of competences for external evaluators in North Macedonia
National standard of competences for external evaluators in Kosovo*
National standard of competences for external evaluators in Montenegro

RECRUITMENT PROCESSES FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

1. Principles of effective recruitment processes

The recruitment of external evaluators is a critical process that significantly impacts the quality and credibility of external evaluation processes. To ensure that this process is both efficient and effective, it must adhere to several core principles:

Transparency in the recruitment process builds trust and ensures that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the selection criteria, procedures, and expectations. Recruitment announcements should be public, outlining the roles, responsibilities, and specific qualifications required for the position. Applicants must be informed about each stage of the process, from initial application screening to final selection, with clear communication about timelines, required documentation, and decision-making procedures.

Objectivity is essential to maintain fairness and integrity in the recruitment process. The evaluation of candidates should be based solely on predefined criteria, such as qualifications, experience, skills, and competences relevant to the role of external evaluator. Clear and measurable benchmarks should be used to assess each candidate's suitability. The use of structured interviews, standardized assessment tools, and competence-based evaluation methods can help to ensure that the recruitment is free from bias or subjective influences.

Fairness and Inclusivity: The recruitment process must be designed to give all eligible candidates an equal opportunity to apply and compete for the role. It should be free from discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics. Fairness also means ensuring that the process accommodates candidates from diverse professional backgrounds and experiences, particularly those who bring different perspectives and expertise to the role of external evaluator. Inclusive practices, such as ensuring accessible application procedures for all candidates and offering equal chances at each stage of the selection, are crucial.

Competence-based Selection: The recruitment process should focus on selecting candidates who meet the core competences required for external evaluation roles. This includes a thorough evaluation of each applicant's professional knowledge, skills, and attributes related to educational evaluation. Competences such as critical thinking, analytical abilities, understanding of evaluation methodologies, and communication skills should be prioritized during selection. Additionally, evaluators should demonstrate the ability to adapt to diverse educational contexts and challenges. The Regional Standard of Competences, and its national derivatives, can be a good source of competences needed for the successful future implementation of external evaluation process and work in the team of external evaluators.

Consistency across all stages of recruitment ensures that all candidates are assessed using the same criteria and procedures. A standardized approach, from initial advertising to final interviews, guarantees that each applicant is treated equally. Using a consistent scoring system and feedback process for all applicants not only upholds fairness but also facilitates the identification of the most qualified candidates for the role. It is recommended that the standardized approach, including the scoring system, is described in writing and that the track of the recruitment process is also kept in writing.

Professional Development: An effective recruitment process should not only focus on selecting qualified individuals but also on identifying potential for future professional growth. Candidates should be selected not only for their current competences but also for their ability to develop further through continuous professional development. Offering training and development opportunities post-recruitment ensures that external evaluators continue to grow in their roles and stay updated with the latest evaluation practices and standards.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical standards must guide the entire recruitment process. This includes safeguarding the confidentiality of applicants' information, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and preventing conflicts of interest among those involved in the recruitment. It is recommended that the principles of confidentiality, transparency and prevention of conflict of interests are confirmed in written form by participants in the selection process. Upholding ethical practices ensures the integrity of the process and reinforces the trust of stakeholders in the selection of evaluators.

By integrating these principles into the recruitment process for external evaluators, quality assurance agencies can ensure that they select highly qualified, competent professionals who are capable of conducting fair, consistent, and high-quality evaluations. This strengthens the overall education system and promotes trust in the evaluation process.

2. Use of Standard of Competences in Recruitment

The Use of Standard Competences in Recruitment plays an important role in ensuring that the recruitment of external evaluators is aligned with the expectations and responsibilities of the role. The Regional and National Standards of Competences provides a clear and structured framework that guides the entire recruitment process by outlining the essential competences and abilities that candidates must possess.

The standard defines the job profile of external evaluators, focusing on their role in planning and carrying out evaluations, collaborating with stakeholders, and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations. the standards provide a benchmark for determining the entry requirements and areas of expertise necessary for the role. This helps to ensure that the evaluators selected have the right mix of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively carry out their duties (where it must be noted that, at the recruitment level, the candidates do not necessarily have to comply with the whole standard; rather, their potential for meeting standard's requirements in the future is evaluated).

The standard serves as a practical tool for recruitment, helping agencies identify individuals who are not only technically qualified but also capable (or will be capable after the initial training) of managing the complexities of external evaluations and are prepared to meet the specific demands of their roles, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process.

TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS

1. Role and Purpose of Training Needs Analysis (TNA)

The primary purpose of conducting a **Training Needs Analysis (TNA)** is to identify the specific training requirements of external evaluators, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their roles effectively. By understanding the gaps in knowledge, skills and competences, institutions can tailor training programmes to address these areas, keeping it at the same time in line with the institutional needs, thus fostering the continuous professional development of evaluators, institution and improving the overall quality of evaluations.

Within the framework of the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) project, a Regional Training Needs Analysis Questionnaire was developed specifically for external evaluators, on the basis of the Regional Standard of Competences for External Evaluators. Using this tool, research was conducted to identify the training needs across the region, which informed the creation of a Regional Training Programme for external evaluators and its implementation. The questionnaire was further adapted and implemented at the national level in seven economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. The insights gained from these national assessments played a key role in the development and implementation of tailored national training programmes.
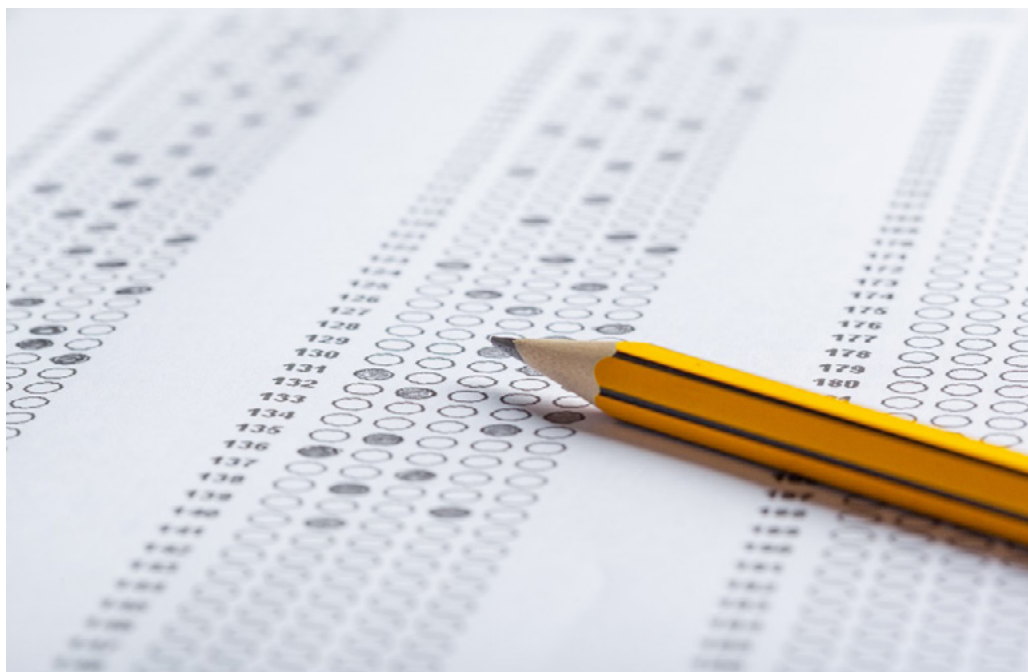
2. Development and structure of TNA Questionnaire

The process of developing the Training Needs Analyses (TNA) questionnaire under the EQET SEE project involved a collaborative effort between ERI SEE expert and experts from seven economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. Representatives from the quality assurance agencies responsible for overseeing education quality in these economies played a crucial role in ensuring the questionnaire was comprehensive and relevant to the regional context.

The foundation for the questionnaire was the Regional Standard of Competences for External Evaluators, also developed under the EQET SEE project.

The questionnaire itself was divided into several key sections, including:

- Legal and Institutional Background and Quality Assurance: Focusing on the evaluators' understanding of legal frameworks and institutional requirements for quality assurance.
- Quality Assurance Methods: Assessing the evaluators' familiarity and experience with various quality assurance methods and their application in practice.
- Communication: Evaluating the skills related to effective communication in evaluation processes.
- Social Context: Addressing how external evaluators account for broader social issues in their work.
- Socio-demographic Background: Collecting information on evaluators' personal and professional backgrounds to ensure a diverse and representative sample.

The TNA questionnaire was then adapted at the national level, allowing for local contexts to be taken into account while maintaining a consistent structure across all economies. The insights from this national implementation contributed significantly to the development of customized national training programmes.

Further details on the regional training programme and its implementation will be covered in the next chapter.

3. Implementation of TNA Questionnaire

After the TNA questionnaire was developed, it was used to conduct research in all seven economies (using the platform LimeSurvey), to identify joint needs at regional level. This platform enabled efficient data collection from external evaluators across all seven economies involved in the EQET SEE project: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. Once distributed, responses were collected through a centralized system, which allowed for a unified analysis of the regional data. The analysis was conducted by external expert and presented to the members of the EQET SEE working group. The data collected provided critical data for shaping the Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators.

At the national level, the TNA questionnaire was adapted to reflect the specific contexts of each economy. This included tailoring the questions to align with national policy frameworks, external evaluation procedures, and the geographical distribution of institutions responsible for quality as-

surance within the national system. The nationally adapted questionnaires were also uploaded on the Lime Survey platform and distributed to all registered external evaluators within each economy respectively. The national working groups were responsible for analyzing the results at the local level, using the collected data to refine national training programmes for external evaluators.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Regional questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in English
Annex 2. National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in Serbia
National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in Albania
National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in Croatia
National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in North Macedonia
National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in BIH
National questionnaire for assessing external evaluators needs for trainings in Moldova

COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT

1. Role and Purpose of Competence Assessment

Competence assessment plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of external evaluators by providing a structured approach to evaluating their skills, knowledge, and competences relevant for their performance. The main objective of competence assessment is to identify strengths and areas for improvement, which helps in enhancing both the quality of evaluations and the professional growth of evaluators. This process ensures that evaluators are equipped to carry out their tasks in a reliable and consistent manner, adhering to established standards.

Within the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) project, The *Competence Assessment Questionnaire* was developed as a **360-Degree Evaluation Questionnaire**, offering a multi-dimensional perspective on the performance of external evaluators. This questionnaire gathers feedback from various sources, including supervisors, colleagues, and the evaluators themselves, providing a comprehensive view of each evaluator's competences and effectiveness.

Additionally, the 360-Degree Evaluation Questionnaire serves as a valuable tool for internal evaluations of external evaluators' work. As a basis for performance monitoring, it enables quality assurance agencies to uphold consistent standards and drive professional growth among evaluators, ensuring that the evaluation process remains rigorous and aligned with both regional and national standards.

This questionnaire was designed in alignment with the Regional standard of competences for external evaluators, and its specific use will be detailed in the following chapter. This approach ensures that competence assessment is directly linked to the established standards, providing a comprehensive framework for evaluating external evaluators in the region.

2. Development and Implementation of 360-degree evaluation questionnaires

The development and implementation of the 360-degree evaluation questionnaires within the EQET SEE project was designed to provide a comprehensive tool for competence assessment of external evaluators. The process aimed to create a system that could be utilized by quality assurance agencies across seven economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia) for self-assessment and feedback from peers and management.

The **360-degree evaluation** system includes three distinct levels: self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and management evaluation. The primary objective is to evaluate the work of external evaluators (EEs) through a multi-dimensional approach that includes supervisor evaluations, self-evaluations, and peer evaluations, thereby encouraging a culture of constructive feedback and continuous learning.

In terms of implementation, institutions have the flexibility to apply all three levels of assessment or tailor the process to meet their specific needs. The questionnaires are adaptable and can be

modified to include additional feedback questions or to fit the particular context of each institution. This flexibility ensures that the tool remains relevant and effective across different national and institutional frameworks.

The **360-degree evaluation**, as developed within the EQET SEE project, is not just a method for assessing competences but also a means of fostering growth. By using the feedback received from peers and management, evaluators can better understand their performance and identify opportunities for improvement. The anonymity and careful handling of feedback are critical to ensuring that evaluators feel secure in the process, promoting honest and constructive input.

3. Incorporating Feedback,
Continuous Improvement, and Documentation

Effective competence assessment should not be viewed as a one-time process but as part of an ongoing cycle of improvement. Integrating feedback mechanisms into the assessment framework plays a crucial role in ensuring that external evaluators' performance is consistently enhanced. By embedding systematic feedback into the competence assessment process, organizations can foster continuous improvement while ensuring transparency and accountability through proper documentation.

Feedback Mechanisms: Feedback is at the core of any improvement process, particularly in competence assessments for external evaluators. The purpose of incorporating feedback is twofold: to provide evaluators with constructive insights into their performance and to allow institutions to refine their evaluation systems based on the feedback received.

Key strategies for feedback integration include:

- Structured Feedback Loops: Implementing structured feedback loops ensures that evaluators receive input from various sources—self-evaluations, peer reviews, and management assessments (as outlined in the 360-degree evaluation). This comprehensive approach allows for a holistic view of an evaluator's competences.
- Anonymity in Peer Reviews: Ensuring that feedback from peers remains anonymous is essential for fostering honest and constructive feedback. Anonymity encourages evaluators to provide candid insights without the fear of professional repercussions.
- Constructive and Action-Oriented Feedback: Feedback provided through the questionnaires should be both constructive and action-oriented. Quantitative feedback should be supplemented with qualitative explanations, offering evaluators clear reasoning behind the assessments and guidance for improvement.
- Open-Ended Questions for Additional Insights: Incorporating open-ended questions such as "What improvements can be made?" or "Why did you provide this rating?" can offer deeper insights and facilitate a more meaningful dialogue about performance and development needs.

For the competence assessment process to remain effective and relevant, it must evolve in response to the insights gained from feedback. Continuous improvement involves the regular review and adaptation of the assessment process and tools, based on emerging needs, evolving standards, and organizational goals.

Institutions should periodically review the questionnaires and assessment criteria to ensure alignment with current standards and institutional objectives. This can involve updating the question-

naires based on the Regional Standard of Competences for External Evaluators or new findings from evaluators' training needs assessments.

Competence assessments should be part of an iterative process that includes not only the assessment but also follow-up actions. After receiving feedback, evaluators should be encouraged to set professional development goals, participate in targeted training, and engage in continuous learning.

Institutions should foster a culture of growth by providing evaluators with opportunities to act on the feedback they receive. This may involve offering training programmes, workshops, or peer-learning sessions that address identified areas for improvement.

Documenting assessment outcomes is critical for maintaining transparency and accountability within the evaluation process. Proper documentation ensures that all stakeholders—evaluators, peers, management, and quality assurance agencies—have a clear record of the assessment and the outcomes, fostering a culture of trust and responsibility.

Institutions should clearly document the entire assessment process, including who participated in the evaluation (while ensuring anonymity where necessary), the feedback provided, and the outcomes. Documentation should be structured and accessible to relevant stakeholders to ensure clarity and consistency.

Assessment reports should outline not only the performance of external evaluators but also the rationale behind the assessments. These reports should include a summary of both quantitative and qualitative feedback, highlighting areas of strength and improvement. Such reports can serve as a foundation for professional development plans and future assessments.

Institutions must also develop clear guidelines for managing and storing assessment data. This includes defining who has access to the data, how long it will be retained, and how it will be used in decision-making processes. Care should be taken to ensure compliance with legal and institutional data protection standards.

The feedback and data collected from each assessment cycle should inform future rounds of evaluation. This creates a feedback loop where past insights are continuously integrated into improving both individual evaluator performance and the overall assessment process.

By integrating feedback mechanisms, fostering continuous improvement, and maintaining transparent and accountable documentation, institutions can enhance the effectiveness of competence assessments for external evaluators. This structured approach not only supports the professional growth of evaluators but also ensures that the assessment process remains robust, reliable, and aligned with institutional goals.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Questionnaires for an external evaluator's competence assessment in English

TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

1. Purpose and Significance of the Training Programmes for External Evaluators

Training programmes for external evaluators are designed to ensure that evaluators are well-prepared and continually developed to perform their roles effectively. Two critical components of these programmes are the Initial Training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), both serving essential but distinct purposes.

Initial Training for External Evaluators

The initial training provides external evaluators with the foundational knowledge and skills they need to carry out evaluations in alignment with established standards. It ensures they understand the evaluation procedures, relevant frameworks, and the expectations of their role. By equipping evaluators with these essentials early on, the training promotes consistency in how evaluations are conducted and helps evaluators apply best practices right from the start. The initial training can often consist of "job shadowing" a more experienced colleague for a certain period of time.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for External Evaluators

CPD is equally important as it supports the ongoing development of evaluators throughout their careers. The purpose of CPD is to develop external evaluators' competences further, and keep them updated on new methodologies, emerging trends in education quality assurance, and any changes in institutional standards. It provides opportunities for evaluators to refine their skills, address areas for improvement, and adapt to evolving expectations. Regular engagement in CPD activities ensures that evaluators continue to enhance their effectiveness, contributing to the continuous improvement of the evaluation process. Apart from structured trainings, peer exchange activities, where external evaluators exchange ideas, experiences and practices, can also serve as a form of a CPD.

As part of the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) project, a Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators was developed and implemented, based on insights from the Regional TNA analysis. The details of this programme will be further explained in the following chapter.

2. Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators within EQET SEE project

The Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators was developed as part of the Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe (EQET SEE) project, which aims to strengthen quality assurance systems in education across seven economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. The design of the training programme was informed by a comprehensive Training Needs Analyses (TNA) conducted across these economies and Regional Standard of competences

framework, identifying the specific skills and knowledge gaps among external evaluators. The programme was developed by experts from Portugal's *Inspectorate for Education and Science* (*Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência*), experienced in quality assurance and external evaluation in pre-tertiary education.

The training programme was validated by a working group consisting of representatives from quality assurance actors involved in external evaluation of the seven economies involved in the project, ensuring that the programme is contextually relevant and adapted to the region's needs.

Purpose and Objectives of the Regional Training Programme

The primary purpose of the Regional Training Programme is to equip external evaluators with essential competences and practical skills needed to conduct high-quality evaluations of educational institutions. The programme focuses on the development of evaluators' ability to plan, carry out, and review evaluation processes effectively, ensuring that evaluators can make well-informed judgments based on evidence. It seeks to align evaluators' practices with the regional standard of competences for external evaluators, which are crucial for improving educational outcomes and promoting accountability and continuous improvement in educational institutions.

This programme is structured in modules to provide a comprehensive understanding of the external evaluation process, from its theoretical foundations to practical implementation. The programme also emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct, leadership, and effective communication throughout the evaluation process, as well as data analysis techniques that support evidence-based decision-making. It also includes modules focused on the social and environmental dimensions of external evaluation.

The Regional Training Programme is designed to serve a dual purpose, depending on the modules reproduced. Firstly, it can function as an Initial Training Programme for newly recruited external evaluators, providing them with the foundational skills and knowledge needed to begin their roles. Secondly, the programme can be used separately as a tool for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for the up-grade of external evaluators' competences.

Programme Structure

The Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators is organized into several key modules, each addressing critical aspects of the external evaluation process. The programme integrates both theoretical learning and practical activities, with a strong focus on developing critical evaluation skills.

Module 1: Introduction to External Evaluation

This module provides participants with a comprehensive introduction to the external evaluation process, starting with its nature and purpose. It includes a detailed exploration of the ethical principles and policies underpinning external evaluation, highlighting the dual goals of accountability and empowerment within the educational system. The module also covers the historical development of external evaluation at the international, regional, and national levels, helping participants understand how their own work fits within the broader context. Through guided discussions and case studies, evaluators are trained to distinguish between different purposes of evaluation and to understand their responsibilities in upholding professional standards.

Key learning outcomes of this module include:

- Understanding the foundational principles of external evaluation.
- Differentiating between the goals of accountability and empowerment.
- Recognizing the key ethical considerations involved in conducting evaluations.

Module 2: Leadership and Management in the Evaluation Process

Leadership and effective management are essential for the success of external evaluation teams. This module focuses on the development of leadership qualities necessary for decision-making during the evaluation process. Through case studies and role-playing exercises, participants learn to identify and apply key leadership characteristics within evaluation teams, developing skills to manage team dynamics and ensure the success of evaluation activities.

Participants also engage in practical exercises to create evaluation plans, simulating the role of a team leader responsible for guiding the evaluation process from planning to implementation. This module prepares evaluators to anticipate and manage challenges within the evaluation process, ensuring they can lead their teams to effectively meet their objectives.

Key learning outcomes include:

- Understanding the characteristics of effective leadership in evaluation.
- Developing skills for managing evaluation teams and processes.
- Creating detailed and effective evaluation plans.

Module 3: Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis are fundamental components of the evaluation process. This module provides evaluators with the tools and techniques necessary to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants explore strategies for designing questionnaires, conducting interviews, and observing classroom practices, all within the framework of external

evaluation. The module emphasizes the importance of triangulation—using multiple data sources to ensure the validity and reliability of evaluation findings.

Through group work and practical exercises, participants are trained in developing data collection strategies aligned with the external evaluation framework. They also learn to analyze the collected data critically, identifying patterns and making evidence-based judgments. This module is crucial in ensuring that evaluators have the skills to provide accurate and meaningful insights into the performance of educational institutions.

Key learning outcomes include:

- Designing and implementing effective data collection strategies.
- Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data within the evaluation framework.
- Applying triangulation techniques to ensure robust evaluation outcomes.

Module 4: Interpersonal Communication Skills

Effective communication is a key competency for external evaluators, particularly in interactions with school staff, students, and other stakeholders. This module focuses on developing interpersonal skills necessary for conducting interviews and communicating evaluation findings clearly and ethically. Participants engage in role-playing exercises that simulate real-world evaluation scenarios, allowing them to practice and refine their communication skills in a supportive environment.

This module also emphasizes the importance of ethical communication, ensuring that evaluators conduct their work with transparency and integrity. By the end of this module, participants will be equipped to handle a variety of interpersonal situations that arise during the evaluation process, ensuring that they can communicate their findings in a constructive and professional manner.

Key learning outcomes include:

- Developing effective and ethical communication skills.
- Conducting interviews with various stakeholders in the evaluation process.
- Communicating evaluation findings in a clear and constructive manner.

Module 5: Effective Communication and Reporting

This module is dedicated to enhancing evaluators' skills in crafting clear, structured, and impactful external evaluation reports. Led by trainers Isabel Barata and Rosa Micaelo, participants engage in both theoretical learning and practical exercises that emphasize effective reporting style, accurate data triangulation, and the production of well-supported evaluative judgments.

Key learning outcomes include:

- Identifying essential writing style features for EE reports.
- Critically assessing report quality based on clarity and impact.
- Triangulating diverse data sources to make sound, evidence-based conclusions.

Through hands-on activities, including case study analysis and report drafting, participants apply core concepts to real-world scenarios, ensuring their ability to communicate findings clearly and constructively. This module equips evaluators with essential tools for generating actionable reports that promote transparency and drive educational improvements.

The *Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators* provides a solid foundation for external evaluators, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and competences required to perform their roles effectively. The programme's structure, developed with input from experts and validated by regional quality assurance agencies, ensures that it is both comprehensive and adaptable to the specific needs of the region.

The **Regional Training Programme for External Evaluators** also incorporates modules focused on social sustainability, gender equity, and environmental considerations in the evaluation process. These essential components are embedded in the training to ensure that external evaluators are equipped to assess not only educational quality but also the broader social, gender, and environmental impacts of institutions. By providing evaluators with the necessary knowledge and tools, the programme promotes a comprehensive approach to evaluation, ensuring that key aspects of social responsibility, gender equity, and environmental sustainability are integrated into institutional assessments. Further details on these modules will be provided in the following chapter.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Regional training programme for external evaluators (Module 1, Module 2, Module 3, Module 4, Module 5)

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GENDER ISSUES

1. Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of modern education systems, with external evaluators contributing to this transformation. Through the external evaluation process, in their communication with the school management, staff and pupils, external evaluators are in a unique position to encourage schools to reflect on the aspects of environmental sustainability in their every-day functioning.

Evaluators should advocate for schools to implement a range of eco-friendly practices, such as introducing environmental topics into curricula, introducing additional measures, such as recycling programmes, energy conservation measures, and the sustainable management of resources.

The regional training for external evaluators included a module on environmental sustainability, based on the "**Education for Sustainable Development – How to Improve Environmental Performance in Schools?**" handbook. This module aims to equip evaluators and educators with essential tools and knowledge for assessing and enhancing environmental sustainability in educational institutions. The national training courses are advised to re-iterate this module to all external evaluators, promoting practices described in the handbook.

Key Learning Outcomes of this module:

- Participants familiarize themselves with the fundamental concepts of sustainable development, sustainable development goals (SDGs), and education for sustainable development (ESD).

- Participants learn to connect environmental themes with sustainable development goals and integrate them into school management and operations.

- Participants acquire the skills to promote and support the development of eco-schools by articulating their benefits and encouraging sustainable practices.

- Participants gain an understanding of the tools and methods that schools can use to perform environmental reviews and improve their environmental performance.

Overview of Training Content:

The training module consists of three sessions, each designed to progressively build participants' knowledge and practical skills in improving environmental sustainability within schools.

Session I: Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Education for Sustainable Development

This session introduces participants to the overarching concepts of sustainable development, the SDGs, and the role of education in achieving sustainability. The content draws from the Education for Sustainable Development – How to Improve Environmental Performance in Schools handbook, providing practical insights for educators and evaluators.

Session II: Recognizing and Promoting Eco-Schools

In this session, participants will explore the characteristics of eco-schools and the steps necessary to support schools in becoming more environmentally responsible. The session covers the benefits of eco-schools and outlines how sustainable development goals can be integrated into school management and operations.

Session III: Tools for Integrating Sustainable Development into School Management

The final session focuses on the practical tools and methods that schools can use to enhance their environmental performance. Participants will learn about eco-mapping and the development of a green action plan, both of which are essential for conducting an environmental review and improving sustainability in schools.

This training module aims to inspire participants to initiate a "domino effect" of green schools throughout the Western Balkans and Moldova, fostering a generation of environmentally conscious students and institutions.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Regional training programme for external evaluators
     – environmental sustainability module
     Annex 2. Mahmutaj (2024), Education for sustainable development, in English

2. Social sustainability and gender equity

Social sustainability and gender equity are integral to creating inclusive educational environments. External evaluators play a vital role in assessing how educational institutions promote policies of equal opportunities for all students, that include socio-economic disparities and gender-related challenges. These evaluations ensure that schools implement practices that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, fostering environments where everyone can succeed.

As part of the EQET SEE project, a dedicated training module for external evaluators has been developed. This module is based on a handbook "Understanding Social Inequalities in the Education Process", also developed within EQET SEE project, and focuses on key issues related to social sustainability and gender equity. The aim of the module is to equip evaluators with the knowledge and skills to identify and assess social inequalities and gender discrimination within educational institutions, and recommend positive practices.

Session 1: Theoretical Foundations – Social and Gender Inequalities

Key learning outcomes:

- Familiarization with core concepts of inequality and gender.
- Understanding the causes of social and gender inequality.
- Exploration of the consequences of gender inequality in various settings.

This session provides evaluators with a foundational understanding of the nature of social and gender inequalities. Participants engage with the underlying causes of these issues and discuss their broader implications in society.

Session 2: Recognizing Social and Gender Inequalities in the Workplace

Key Learning Outcomes:

- Identifying various forms of social inequalities.
- Recognizing the effects of social inequalities in a working environment.
- Detecting discrimination based on gender and disabilities.
- Understanding the impacts of gender and disability discrimination in workplace settings.

During this session, participants learn how to recognize specific instances of social and gender inequality in the context of an organization or working environment, equipping them to assess these dynamics during their evaluations.

Session 3: Applying Techniques for Reducing Social and Gender Inequalities in the Workplace

Key Learning Outcomes:

- Acquiring techniques for reducing social inequalities in a working environment.
- Learning methods for addressing gender inequalities in the workplace.

In the final session, participants are introduced to practical strategies for mitigating social and gender inequalities. This section focuses on actionable techniques that evaluators can apply when assessing institutions, helping to promote a more equitable and inclusive environment.

This module forms a critical part of the overall training, as external evaluators need to be conscious of these issues while ensuring fairness and equity in their assessments.

Annexes:
Annex 1. Regional training programme for external evaluators – social and gender modules
Annex 2. Stanojević (2024), Understanding Social Inequalities in Education Process, in Serbia

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Key Points

The Regional internal quality guidelines for institutions in charge of external evaluation in pre-tertiary education offer valuable guidance for enhancing quality management practices within QA actors involved in external evaluation across South Eastern Europe. Developed as part of the "Enhancements in the Quality of Education and Training in South Eastern Europe" (EQET SEE) Project, these Guidelines provide a comprehensive framework that addresses several critical aspects:

- The Guidelines outline clear procedures for recruiting, training, and assessing external evaluators.
- Emphasizing the need for a Regional Training Programme, the Guidelines advocate for equipping external evaluators with the necessary skills and knowledge. This approach not only strengthens evaluators' capabilities but also enhances the overall effectiveness of evaluation processes.
- By incorporating established frameworks like ISO and CAF, the Guidelines give an overview of best practices in quality management of institutions.
- The development of these Guidelines reflects the commitment of actors involved in external evaluation from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*[13], Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia to work together toward common goals in improving educational quality.

Call to Action for Quality Agencies

Quality assurance actors involved in external evaluation are encouraged to actively engage with the Regional internal quality guidelines for institutions in charge of external evaluation in pre-tertiary education and utilize them as a practical resource in their operations. By considering the following approaches, these institutions can benefit from the Guidelines:

- Actors involved in external evaluation are invited to integrate the Guidelines into their quality management practices, fostering a more consistent approach to external evaluations.
- The Regional Training Programme offers valuable opportunities for both newly recruited and existing evaluators. Institutions are encouraged to explore these training options to enhance evaluators' competences.
- Actors involved in external evaluation can adopt a mindset of continuous improvement by regularly reviewing and refining their practices in line with the Guidelines, allowing them to stay responsive to the changing educational landscape.
- Actors involved in external evaluation are encouraged to share insights and experiences with one another, promoting a culture of collaboration that can lead to shared successes in quality assurance.

By incorporating these Guidelines into their operations, QA actors involved in external evaluation can significantly contribute to enhancing the quality of education in South Eastern Europe. The successful implementation of these Guidelines will lead to more effective evaluations and improved educational outcomes for all learners in the region.

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13 *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence