

# CLO2

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“Professionalising training & mobility  
for Outdoor Animators in Europe  
bridging the gap between sector  
Competences & Learning Outcomes”

## Result 13 Accreditation and Verification Processes from a European Perspective for the Outdoors sector VET



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. BACKGROUND, CLO2 PROJECT</b> .....	4
<b>2. METHODOLOGY AND ACCREDITATION</b> .....	5
<b>3. DEFINITION</b> .....	6
3.1. Accreditation/Verification of an Education or Training Programme.....	6
3.2. Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF).....	7
3.2.1 Aim of the CQAF.....	8
3.3 Example of Accreditation/Verification of an education or training programme .....	9
3.3.1. Why Apply for Accreditation? .....	9
<b>4. COMMON ASSESSMENT STRATEGY</b> .....	10
4.1. Common European Guidelines for Accreditation.....	11
4.3. Sector Specific 3rd Party Accreditation .....	13
4.4. European Register of Professionals.....	13
4.4.1. The European Register of Exercise Professionals .....	15
<b>5. NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ACCREDITATION</b> .....	15
5.1. Germany.....	16
5.2. Ireland.....	17
5.3. Italy.....	19
<b>6. SECTORAL EXAMPLES FOR ACCREDITATION</b> .....	21
6.2. Example model from Hotel and Restaurant Services .....	22
<b>7. RANGE OF RELEVANT ACCREDITATION MODELS FOR THE OUTDOORS</b> .....	22
<b>8. CONCLUSION</b> .....	26

## Foreword

This document has been produced by the Leonardo da Vinci CLO2 -project “Professionalising training and mobility for Outdoor animators in Europe bridging the gap between sector Competences and Learning Outcomes”. One of the project’s main objectives was to discuss, develop and propose a range of accreditation/verification processes for the outdoors in Europe (CLO2 2008). This activity is important as it will help to ensure the proper implementation and use of the innovative set of European Occupational Standards developed for the outdoors, and so the sustainability of the work.

The accreditation system is a relatively new phenomenon in most vocational education and training (VET) systems. Accreditation can mean different things to different EU member states, but the key element of any form of accreditation is its quality (Cedefop, 2009). Higher education accreditation has a longer tradition and only a few CLO2 project partners have had practical experience of this process (Quality on VET-schools 2005, CLO2 2010).

The objective of the work was to collect and analyse the latest accreditation developments and propose a range of relevant accreditation and verification processes for the outdoors. Accreditation commonly refers either to official recognition of educational institutions and their study programmes by competent authorities or to the award of various quality labels to educational institutions. Accreditation is carried out on a regular basis, each time reviewing whether the organisation’s operations or study programmes satisfy the specified minimum quality criteria. In the case of the CLO2 project, we have decided to focus our work on the accreditation of training programmes in the outdoors.

Reflection on a variety of accreditation processes has been carried out by the group to be able to offer a potential accreditation and verification solution that may be relevant and applicable for the outdoors in Europe. The final objective is to ensure appropriate implementation of the European standards developed through the EQFOA and CLO2 projects, and a guarantee of the relevance of the learning outcomes delivered through the training programmes. Our main goal is to educate a competent workforce (paid and /or unpaid) for the sector, which means individuals with the right skills and competences able to deliver work in line with the expectations of the employers and customers.

The accreditation process can be described as an independent evaluation of Vocational Education and Training programmes to assess whether the programmes are in line (or not) with the content of the standards developed for the sector to guarantee the development of competent individuals. The CLO2 Competence Framework developed during the EQFOA / CLO2 Project represents the minimum standard an individual should reach to be considered as competent to deliver the work of Outdoor Animator. The starting point for this report is the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) developed by the European Commission’s technical working group (TWG) on quality in VET (2003-2005) and further studies completed by Cedefop, European Center for the Development of Vocational Education.

Cedefop recently published (2009) a document entitled “Accreditation and quality assurance in vocational education” that has been used as an important source to develop the content of the following report on accreditation in the outdoors. Examples detailed from different European countries gave the opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the current national situations and existing systems. The two sectoral examples presented through the report for Health and Fitness and Hotels and Tourism have been produced by past Leonardo da Vinci projects in 2005 and 2007. These sectors have been forerunners in the accreditation field and the outdoors sector is now following them by exploring different accreditation scenarios to envisage the development of its own relevant model in this field.

## 1. BACKGROUND, CLO2 PROJECT

At a European level, the outdoors sub-sector is a fast growing and developing activity area. The outdoors thrives in a wide range of delivery and employment contexts including public sector, commercial, charitable, not-for-profit and voluntary. As a consequence, workforce needs (both paid and voluntary) are increasing rapidly and organisations operating within the sector are seeking well trained, quality workers (animators in this context), able to match the requirements of more and more demanding clients and users.

Unfortunately until now, there has been no formal link at European level between the competences required by outdoor employers and organisations, and the learning outcomes acquired by the employees through training supplied by training providers, no matter how good this training may have been.

In other words, never have European outdoor employers mutually agreed, the functions and competences they required, nor has a bridge ever been established between these requirements and the vocational and educational training provided by training bodies. The first step, the development of a range of integrated documents including Occupational Descriptions for Assistant Outdoor Animator, Outdoor Animator and Specialised Outdoor Animator roles, plus a Functional Map and a Competence Framework for the Outdoor Animator role, has now been completed under the previous EQFOA – European Qualifications Framework Outdoor Animator project ([www.eqfoa.eu](http://www.eqfoa.eu)) supported by Leonardo de Vinci.

The main aim of this follow-on European outdoors project CLO2 was to bridge from EQFOA's Functional Map and Competence Framework, to the skills and learning outcomes delivered by the training providers in the field. CLO2's main work activities:

- Establish the importance and level of the competences required by the employers in line with the European Qualifications Framework;
- Develop the learning outcomes and match them with the competences (knowledge, skills, behaviours/attitudes) required bringing them together in a 'Unit and Credit Framework';
- Set a range of accreditation and verification processes that may be relevant and implemented in the outdoors.

The project's developments also acted as a platform to enable training providers to align the content of their programmes with the qualification needs of employers established at the European level.

The needs of the sector have been identified at the start of the project:

- An accredited, comparable and transparent sector qualification structure;
- Training programmes echoing employer and market needs;
- High quality, trained employees;
- The mobility of appropriately qualified employees to be encouraged and enabled.

The CLO2 project (building upon work from the previous EQFOA project) took a huge step towards meeting these needs. It provided a solution jointly agreed by employers and training providers that will encourage and maintain the continued growth and development of the outdoor sector labour markets.

The partners working together to achieve these ambitious and fundamental activities have been selected for their particular competences in the fields addressed: firstly a group of outdoor employers' unions that analysed and fine-tuned the results of the EQFOA project (Occupational map, Functional Map and Competence Framework for Outdoor Animators), in order to present it to training providers in a logical and detailed way, and secondly a group of training providers that then established the learning/knowledge outcomes needed by future students/trainees in order to match the competences requested, and to set a coherent methodology for a quality assurance framework within the field in Europe.

A third group composed of the main sector European organisations helped and supported the consortium with both desk research and primary research on the one hand, and also consultation,

dissemination and distribution into the wider landscape of the Sport and Active Leisure Sector on the other.

From an accreditation perspective, the goal of the work was to use the Common Quality Assurance Framework as a platform to implement desk research to look for other existing relevant examples, and tried and tested models of best practice already implemented in the Sport and Active Leisure sector and/or even other sectors.

**The following questions were a starting point for discussions to obtain a better overview of the current situation:**

- Are there any outdoors qualifications in project countries which are regulated by law?
- Which are the recognized competent authorities able to award/endorse outdoors qualifications?
- By whom are the outdoors training programs validated and/or accredited in partner countries?
- Are there any systems to ensure that Outdoor qualifications deliver effective professionals required by the industry?
- Are the bodies awarding qualifications separate from training providers?
- Is it possible to obtain an outdoors qualification through the validation of informal and non-formal learning?
- Why provide or apply for accreditation?

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND ACCREDITATION

The working methodology and responsibilities of each partner involved within the process were discussed and agreed in detail during the Full Partner Meetings. The common opinion was that the Outdoor sector, in order to ensure a relevant implementation of the innovative standards and the development of a competent workforce, needed to explore the possibility of putting in place a relevant accreditation and verification process. Such a process has been implemented in the Fitness Sector, which has a longer tradition of international co-operation and development. This step is necessary to promote the use and sustainability of the set of standards developed through a common approach. In turn, this could enable and enhance the mobility and career path developments in EU member countries and improve the quality of VET systems (EQFOA, 2008).

In parallel, it was also agreed that there was a need to obtain some more precise information and examples of good models of accreditation practice through thorough desk research in Europe. The idea was to use different research methods and channels such as the internet, European and national documentation, the European Commission, European forums and conferences, Cedefop, and also existing work undertaken by other Sport and Active Leisure sub-sectors and even other sectors.

The need to identify relevant organisations to consult with on any European outdoors accreditation process requires consideration. Various national and pan-European organisations have voiced an interest in being consulted on any future accreditation process. The European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) with its focus on the commercial aspects of the outdoors recreation sub-sector in 7 EU member states, and SkillsActive, a sector skills council with responsibility for the full spectrum of sub-sectors within the UK outdoors and with its established role in accreditation and occupational standards development, are two amongst others ideally placed for involvement in any consultation. Constructing a suitable collaboration to ensure full sector coverage would be critical to the success and recognition of any scheme.

Through the EQFOA and CLO2 projects the outdoors sector has been put in place the component parts of a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy. The products which have been developed include an occupational map and occupational descriptors, functional map, work-based competence and learning outcomes framework.

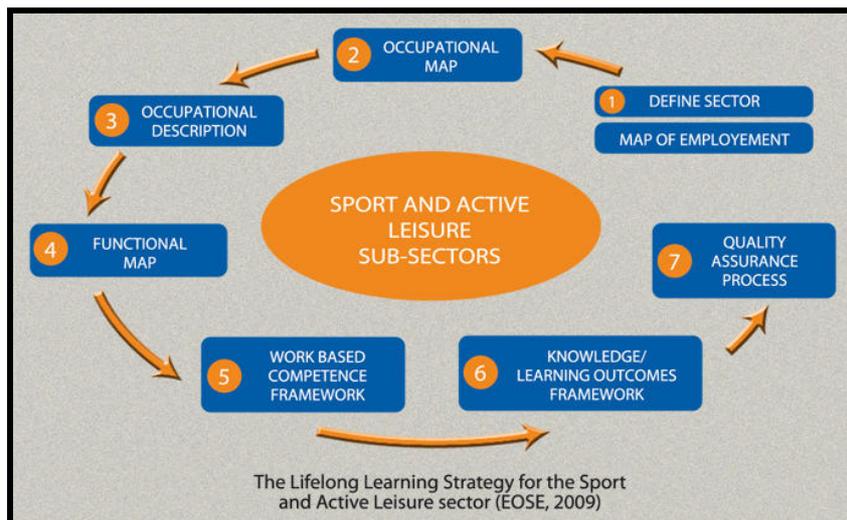


Figure 1

This common Lifelong Learning methodology to develop occupational standards has been developed for the whole Sport and Active Leisure sector through the EQF-Sport project run by EOSE in 2007/2008. The development of occupational standards is industry-led and the content specifies the standards of performance that people are expected to achieve in their work, and the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively. In other words, standards define the competences, skills & knowledge needed for the jobs of the sector.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy has been designed and developed:

- To organise the Sport and Active Leisure sector in Europe in support of the elements of the European White Paper on Sport published by the European Commission in July 2007 especially related to Vocational Qualifications, EQF, EQARF and ECVET.
- To take the major opportunity created by the EQF to coordinate qualifications & training for VET and HE in the sector.
- To enhance social inclusion, personal development and active citizenship but also employability.
- To promote a transparent and flexible education and training system with clear learning and career pathways and respond to the VET challenges.
- To ensure the development of a competent workforce with the right skills and competences in line with the expectation of the employers in the Sport and Active Leisure sector in Europe.
- To make movement between education and employment easier & to support the Lifelong Learning process
- To develop mobility, transparency and mutual trust of qualifications, raise standards and facilitate the growth of business opportunities.
- To ensure there are qualifications and training that equip people to work in the Sport and Active Leisure sector because many jobs require specific technical knowledge and skills (e.g. health and safety is very important).

The final step (step 7) in this recognised methodology is a quality assurance process.

### 3. DEFINITION

The first activity through step 7 of the LLL Strategy, which was quite new for a large majority of the project’s partners, was to identify and precisely define the meaning of an accreditation and verification process.

#### 3.1. Accreditation/Verification of an Education or Training Programme

*“A process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to a program of education or training, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or Professional authorities by having met predetermined standards”. (Cedefop 2008)*

According to a document of quality in VET-schools (2006) the concept of accreditation refers to the process of assessing and officially recognising whether an organisation, a programme or an individual is able to perform within a system. The accreditation process is closely linked to quality assurance and a concept of quality is behind every accreditation system. Quality is a rather complex concept which depends on many factors such as the customers’ and other stakeholders’ values, needs and objectives. Quality in education and training can be further divided, for example into structural quality, process quality, and quality of results. Quality development is a continuous process including planning, implementation, evaluation, and assessment, feedback and procedures for change (Quality on VET-schools, 2005).

This process can be considered essential for the outdoors to allow efficient implementation of the European standards at the European level. It is directly related to the verification and accreditation of actual qualifications being delivered by training or educational providers.

The monitoring of Quality Assurance is concerned with promoting confidence amongst employers, professionals, providers and the public that a programme of learning has met an agreed standard. It is particularly important that it can be proven, via a system of 3rd party verification that providers and their qualifications are meeting the standards and expectations of the sector as defined in the Functional Map and full Competence Framework. The objective of this work was to search and propose tools that may be useful to the sector in its quest for a quality assured sector framework accreditation and verification processes.

The word accreditation has caused some confusion within the project group and it took some extra time to discuss the concept of accreditation processes. The partnership included 11 European countries and the concept of accreditation was not clear across the group. In the world of vocational education and training (VET), accreditation can be associated with institutions, programmes, qualifications and even individuals. As well as European level accreditation processes, each partner country has its own national accreditation system. These are usually regulatory processes that a CLO2 accreditation process cannot exercise authority upon (CLO2, 2010). Discussions also highlighted the different competent bodies and stakeholders involved in the process. This illustrated a large variety of systems that need to be taken into consideration.

In this respect, CLO2’s accreditation process is slightly different. Any process recommended by the project needs to be a transparent layer through which other official accreditation systems can be viewed. An approval process (or measuring tool) is needed which maps relevant aspects of training providers’ programmes against the learning outcomes from CLO2. Where there is a match and a programme is successfully benchmarked against CLO2’s standards, approval (or accreditation) can be given (CLO2, 2010). The labelling process and quality assurance are crucial to ensure the proper implementation of the CLO2 standards, the use of which is on a voluntary basis.

### **3.2. Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)**

The CLO2 group has followed the European quality assurance framework, the CQAF.

The CQAF constitutes a European reference framework to ensure and develop quality in VET, building on the key principles of the most relevant existing quality assurance models. It may be considered as a cross reading instrument that can help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing QA models work, to identify areas of provision that need improvement, and take decisions on how to improve them based on common quantitative and qualitative references. (EQFOA 2008, Cedefop 2005)

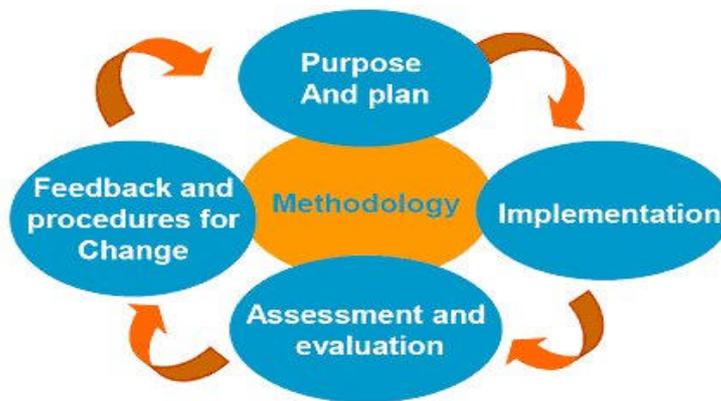
It also allows for capturing and classifying best practice within and across Member States.

The CQAF can be applied at both the system and VET provider levels and can therefore be used to assess the effectiveness of VET. It gives a particular emphasis to the improvement and evaluation of the ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes’ of VET in terms of increasing employability, improving the match between demand and supply, and promoting better access to lifelong training, in particular for disadvantaged people. In total the gains from the use of the CQAF are effectiveness, transparency and mutual trust in VET systems, within and across countries.

Quality assurance and development are a continuous process. The CQAF itself is not an exception. It must be regularly reviewed against particular contexts and existing quality approaches through the assessment of practical initiatives undertaken in different settings, while keeping its main feature of 'context independence'. This is a delicate exercise where feedback plays a key role in reviewing the common references (quality criteria and indicators) of the framework, thereby improving its European added value.

**The CQAF comprises:**

- a model, to facilitate planning, implementation, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in Member States;
- a methodology for assessment and review of systems: the emphasis has been given to self assessment, combined with external evaluation;
- a monitoring system: to be identified as appropriate at national or regional level, and possibly combined with voluntary peer review at European level;
- a measurement tool: a set of reference indicators aiming at facilitating Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems at national or regional levels.



*Figure 2 Common quality assurance framework, Cedefop, 2005*

### 3.2.1 Aim of the CQAF

A European network of competent bodies for quality assurance and development in VET has been established as an initiative of the European Commission with the support of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training on 16-17 June 2005. The network has been set up on a voluntary basis, and its purpose was outlined in the Commission's proposal to the ACVT: to provide relevant stakeholders with a cooperation platform at European level for structured exchange of information and experience, debate, mutual learning, consensus-building and maximisation of output and results, including from European Education and Training programmes, on a continuous basis. The network will also serve as a bridge linking Higher Education to VET (EQFOA, 2008).

While fully respecting Member states competencies and the diversity of QA systems, such a platform should foster transparency and consistency of initiatives across Europe and bring an added value to national and institutional initiatives to assure and develop the quality of VET systems. It should also contribute to raise awareness among the relevant stakeholders, by reflecting the interests of all sections/sectors in VET, including initial, continuing, adult, public and private (EQFOA, 2008).

### 3.3 Example of Accreditation/Verification of an education or training programme

The following diagram shows an example how training and education providers can interact with the full Competence Framework:

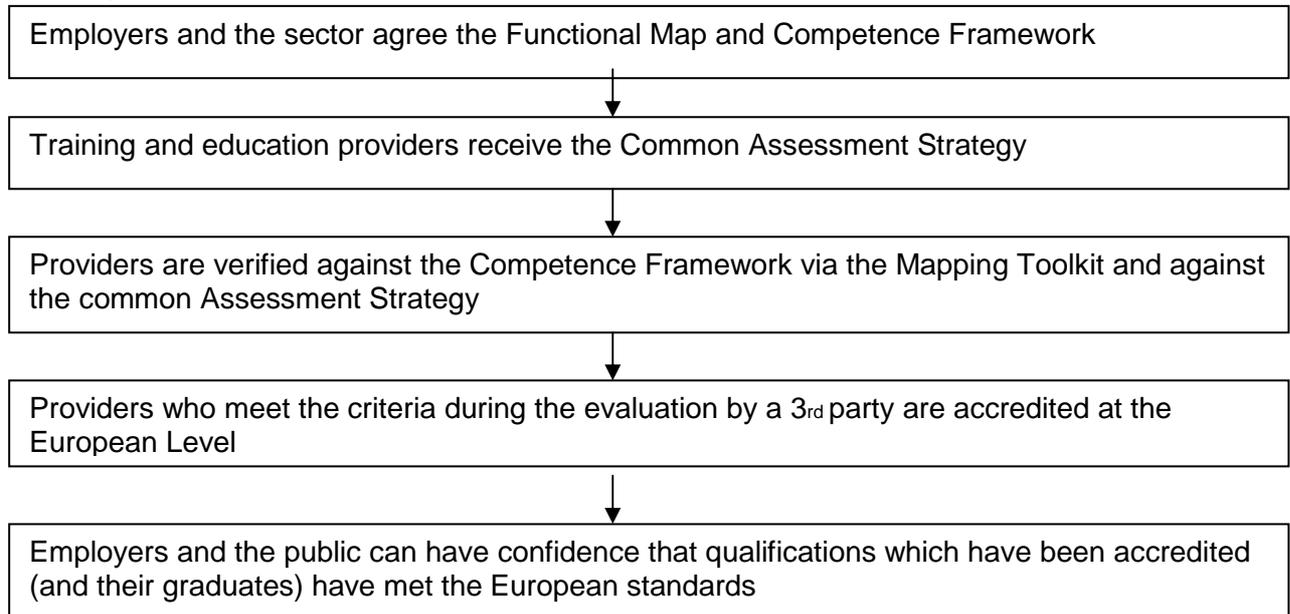


Figure 3: Example of Accreditation/Verification of an education or training programme (EOSE, 2008).

Through engagement with employers, the skills knowledge and competences required to work in the sector will have been identified, described and articulated. The results of this process are contained in the agreed Competence Framework. A key part of the Quality Assurance process is the sector being satisfied that individual qualifications “cover” all the skills, knowledge and competence required by the sector.

The easiest way to ensure coverage of the European standards in an individual programme of learning is to expect the training or education provider to “map” the content of their qualification to the learning outcomes developed from the Competence Framework in line with the realities of the sector and the European Qualifications Framework level. This mapping can be facilitated by a Mapping Toolkit.

The Mapping Toolkit would include a Learning Outcomes Matrix developed by this project plus all the units within the Competence Framework. The way in which a sector expects providers to “map” and show coverage of the Competence Framework can vary. One way of allowing providers to map to the Competence Framework is via the Learning Outcomes Matrix itself with the providers mapping the relevant parts of their qualification directly to the learning outcomes within a suitable template document. This mapping could be referenced by page, chapter, module or day. Alternatively, mapping could take place against identified knowledge, skills and competencies required for the animator role.

A sector could also decide not to produce a mapping document and could simply ask providers to map directly to the European standards and provide confirmation that they are all included in the learning programme or qualification.

#### 3.3.1. Why Apply for Accreditation?

This question needs to be considered from the point of view of different stakeholders at national and international level, such as, educational institutions, employers, and students.

The main reasons and arguments for the accreditation are: increasing the quality of education and training, student and staff mobility, and the attractiveness of vocational education and training (Quality on VET-schools 2005).

At the same time, the procedure produces information verified by external parties about the educational institution and the study programmes it provides. The purpose is to ensure that the study programmes satisfy agreed quality requirements. Accreditation is based on the applicant's description of operations and results, self-evaluation and external evaluation. Accreditation of study programmes involves investigating whether the programmes provide an adequate framework for learning and achievement of other objectives.

From the perspective of employers and the workplace, accreditation makes it possible to identify those programmes that cater for the needs of the workplace in the best possible way. This is why external evaluation groups should include employer representation with appropriate coverage of all outdoors sub-sectors (recreational, educational, etc.) and organisational structures (commercial, public, voluntary, etc.).

Accreditation of education and training refers to the external evaluation carried out to determine whether education and training is implemented in accordance with the specified criteria and standards that are relayed to the applicants. Consequently, accreditation aims to increase the credibility and attractiveness of the study programmes in question.

Internationalisation of the education and training market has created a need to verify the level of foreign study programmes. Increasing student exchange requires educational organisations to be able to find educational institutions with study modules that they can approve as a part of a qualification. At the same time, educational institutions receive support to determine the transferability of credits completed elsewhere. From a student's perspective, accreditation is about consumer protection: are the objectives and contents in line with statements made in curricula and brochures, for example (Finnish National Board of Education, Quality on VET-schools 2005).

#### 4. COMMON ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

A Common Assessment Strategy sets out the requirements for assessment within qualifications which gives further confidence to the sector that not only has the Competence Framework been included in the course manuals and teaching, but that the key elements of knowledge, skills and competence have been assessed to a consistent standard across Europe. The Common Assessment Strategy ensures that graduates from quality assured qualifications can perform at work to the standard agreed by the sector (EQFOA, 2008).

In addition, the Common Assessment Strategy sets out some of the requirements for quality assurance and delivery which have been agreed to be important at the European level. It also ensures consistency between qualifications and the quality of the experience enjoyed by students. All elements of the Common Assessment Strategy would be verified by the relevant 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification system in place in the sector.

As an example, the Common Assessment Strategy can be divided into the following headings, each of which is expanded below:

- Facilities and Equipment
- Support Systems
- Occupational Competence of Tutors and Assessors
- Occupational Competence of Quality Assurance Staff
- Evidence Requirements
- Practical Assessment

##### *Facilities*

To provide a quality student experience it is necessary for a provider to ensure that qualifications are taught and assessed in appropriate facilities. This will often include access to a classroom and in some cases may include specialist facilities. For the outdoors, this will include venues within the natural environment. The exact requirements for facilities can be set by the sector and verified by a relevant 3<sup>rd</sup> party.

### *Equipment*

As with facilities a sector can determine what specialist equipment may be needed to teach and assess in a particular subject area. For example in the outdoors sector this could include water-based activity equipment such as kayaks and paddles, and climbing equipment such as ropes and harnesses.

### *Support Systems*

For a qualification to gain sector support the sector could reasonably expect that the support systems available to students reflect good practice. This would include policies for dealing with complaints and appeals and for ensuring that there is no discrimination of students and that everyone has an equal chance to succeed on the course.

### *Occupational Competence of Tutors, Assessors and Quality Assurance Staff*

A sector at the European level can expect that tutors, assessors and quality assurance staff involved in qualifications approved across Europe are qualified and competent to teach those qualifications. The sector may wish to outline the minimum level of qualifications and experience which they would expect to see and this could be verified by the relevant 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification system.

## **4.1. Common European Guidelines for Accreditation**

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational education, (Cedefop) published a new document on accreditation and quality assurance in 2009. With the CQAF model and the newly adopted European quality assurance reference framework (EQARF) recommendation (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2009), a common basis for quality assurance has been developed at European level. For a number of European countries that have developed a national framework for quality assurance, the CQAF has already served as a guiding instrument. Denmark, Hungary, Norway, Romania and Finland explicitly refer to the European framework in their own national QA systems. Italy has passed a quality charter for initial vocational training that also takes into account the principles of the CQAF. The CQAF has value as a tool for quality assurance across European VET-systems and as reference framework for a better understanding of different approaches towards quality in VET (Cedefop, 2009).

In spite of its overall feasibility, and to make better use of its possibilities, adaptations and improvements could be made in the light of the experience of accreditation in the EU Member States. The existing common framework could be developed into a stronger European instrument if combined with additional elements and standards for external accreditation mainly. There is a need for a set of criteria, standards and rules for the procedures according to which VET providers and programmes should be given accreditation. This should not be an overly complex manual of rules to be followed but consist of a number of basic requirements for how to carry out accreditation; European cooperation could support the streamlining and downsizing of the criteria and rules for accreditation that are currently used in different contexts (Cedefop, 2009).

Common European guidelines defining criteria and rules for accreditation could be developed by Member States or a European accreditation council and applied by the national or any other VET accreditation agency. Based on the insights gained in this study, European guidelines for accreditation procedures could seek: firstly the existence or establishment of an internal quality management system respecting the CQAF principles in the VET provider organisation asking for accreditation; secondly accreditation and quality assurance in vocational education and training.

In a medium-term perspective there are a number of additional challenges and options for common accreditation guidelines that could be tackled at European level. To date, accreditation comprises a yes/no decision. An attestation is given that a certain degree of quality is achieved by a programme or a provider but no incentives are given for improvement of quality. Given the ambition to make European education and training systems a world reference, different levels of quality should be defined. If such a classification system for quality is developed and applied by the European accreditation agencies, this would encourage competition among VET providers and their striving for excellence.

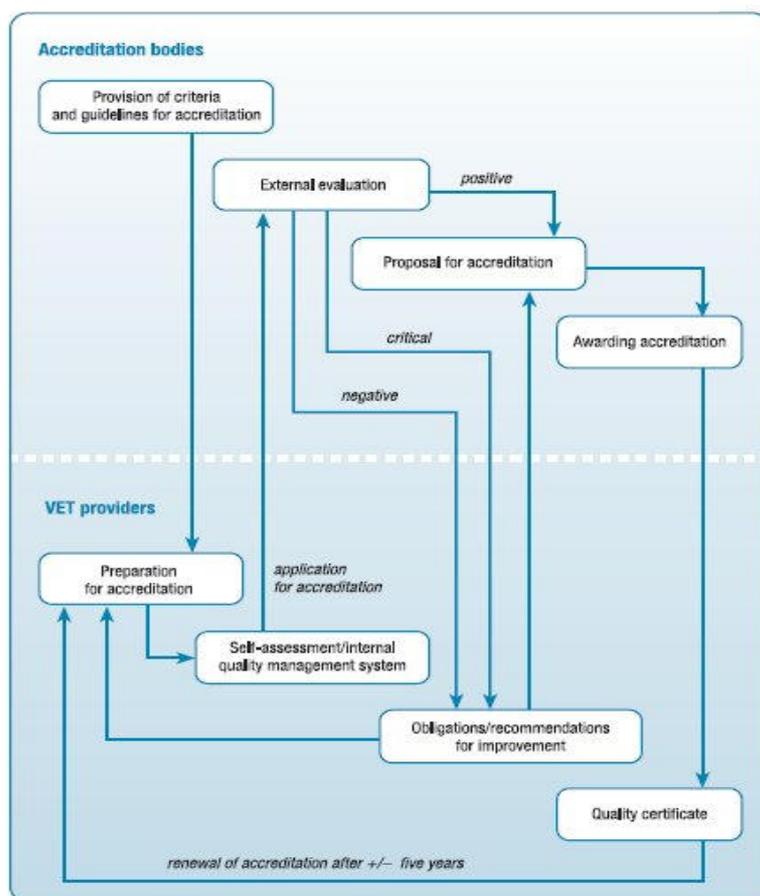
Independent experts and/or peers are involved in most accreditation processes but few profiles describing the necessary competences and skills to fulfill this task have been designed. As VET should seek similar standards in all countries, a competence profile for quality assessors in

accreditation processes should be developed at European level. Given the tendency towards increased accreditation, in the near future a growing number of experts will be needed to carry out appropriate tasks. The development at European level of common training modules for quality assessors in VET would ensure the comparability of accreditation procedures. Assessors, having participated successfully in the respective training programmes could be formally recognised by a European accreditation council for VET.

These suggestions are parts of a European approach to accreditation in VET that could be developed step by step. All activities would contribute to assuring and increasing the quality of training provision in VET. Finally the European accreditation creation of European labels for VET quality could be an organic result of this development and a signifier of the success of European VET cooperation. The first and most important issue for strengthening European cooperation, however, is the accreditation of VET programmes and providers according to commonly agreed criteria, standards and guidelines. This would support common trust in the results of accreditation as well as in the quality of training provision in VET.

As an example in many EU countries the financial support of the European Social Fund could be used to build up institutional capacity for accreditation and quality assurance as a core part of reform and modernisation of national VET systems. According to Article 3, of the regulation for the new funding period of the European structural funds 2007-13, one of the priorities of the ESF is to improve human capital, in particular by promoting the design and introduction of reforms in education and training systems (Cedefop, 2009).

The following diagram is the first model illustrating the accreditation process originating from a Cedefop publication.



Source: Erwin Seyfried.

Figure 4, An example of an accreditation process (Cedefop, 2009).

#### 4.2. Memorandums of Understanding and Trust /Independent Accreditation

The ideal scenario for recognizing qualifications at the European level is through a '**Memorandum of Understanding and Trust**' (MoUT) between the European body and a recognized national authority and where possible a sector specific national competent body. The agreement should comprise of guidance on the relationship with national authorities and the issues and solutions identified through the research carried out within the European body in question.

A recent development has also seen the acceptance of the concept of a MoUT leading to mutual trust where national social partner associations exist to work with the recognised national qualification authority with a mandate from the government of the country in question.

These can be seen in Belgium and the UK. The EHFA (European Health & Fitness Association) Verification Unit has produced processes and a mapping document based on the competence framework and learning outcomes documents described above to aid this work. The difference between a MoUT and an independent verification is that in the case of Belgium and the UK the identified authority signs an agreement stating that the qualifications they have submitted to EHFA meet or exceed the European Standards and adhere to the common assessment strategy. No actual authentication takes place hence the agreement on trust. A more recent development is to look for such an agreement in a country where there is no sector body recognised by the national qualification authority.

Here the agreement would be directly with the national authority itself. Under this system it is not possible to have an agreement with a sector body without the support of the national qualification authority which can be a ministry or body with delegated powers such as the Qualification and Curriculum Development Authority ([www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk)) as in the UK.

The fitness sector is the most advanced area when it comes to tackling the issues of recognising the value of different instructor training programmes at a European level. Due to the total deregulation of the fitness sector in some countries EHFA decided to set up an independent verification process introduced to bring some clear guidance to employers, individuals and training providers in the sector. EHFA decided to implement a third party verification system through which training providers could apply for accreditation direct to EHFA. This is described in the section below.

#### **4.3. Sector Specific 3rd Party Accreditation**

Where it is not possible to implement a system of mutual trust the concept of a sector specific third party accreditation process should be considered. The third party element of this accreditation process, as the vital body allocated to carry out accreditation, should be clearly and transparently independent of any body or bodies which could unduly influence the process. Ideally, this independent body would work to a standards council or committee made up of stakeholders from the sector that have expertise and practical experience of working within the sector and an ability to articulate the key competencies, skills, and knowledge required by those working in the sector.

All of the components of a qualification framework identified in the sections earlier are required before any accreditation can be considered. In addition to this, the independent body must have individuals who are competent in assessing individual training program to ascertain whether the content of the program meets or exceeds the standards requirements and adheres to the common assessment of the specific sector. The key question during an accreditation visit is, "Will this training program deliver a competent individual as identified in the standards to work in the specified occupational area?"

#### **4.4. European Register of Professionals**

As new qualifications, linked to the EQF, are developed and accredited, qualification and employment patterns in sport will become clearer. There will be transparent ways of becoming qualified and having competencies recognised at the European level increasing both employability and mobility across the sport sector. However new qualifications and recognition schemes affect individuals who study and achieve qualifications *in the future*.

No sector can adequately set up systems for the recognition of workers at the national or European level without considering all those who are *currently* working in the sector and who will have a huge

array of qualifications, training and experience, often spanning many years of work. For this reason it is necessary for the sport sector and any sub-sector of sport which wishes to develop a qualifications strategy at the European level to consider the concept of the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

Validation of informal and non-formal learning is closely related to the increasing importance of lifelong learning. The combination of a rapidly changing labour market, an ageing population and intensified global competition makes it necessary to use all available knowledge, skills and competences – irrespective of where and how they have been acquired. The interest in validation can be seen as closely linked to efforts to create more flexible qualifications systems – making it possible for individuals to build learning careers stretching ‘from cradle to grave’.

A growing number of European countries now emphasise the importance of making visible and giving appropriate value to learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, including that gained in the work place.

- Informal learning can be defined as: learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective.
- Non-formal learning can be defined as: learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.

Cedefop (2000) distinguishes between three main phases of the validation process: identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This distinction reflects that even where validation results in a formal certificate or qualification, the identification and assessment stages preceding the formal recognition are critical to the overall process.

The quality of the validation process very much depends on how the initial identification and assessment of the learning is handled. Learning taking place outside formal education and training systems can be characterised as non-standardised and is frequently based on complex, individually specific learning experiences and pathways.

Ensuring the quality of identification and assessment processes, expressed in terms of validity, reliability and credibility, requires careful consideration of the methods and approaches developed to handle the identification and assessment stages.

The methods for the validation of informal and non-formal learning include:

- Tests and examinations: identification and validation of informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system.
- Declarative methods: based on individuals’ own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed by a third party, in order to verify the self-assessment.
- Observation: extracting evidence of competence from an individual while performing everyday tasks at work.
- Simulation and evidence extracted from work: simulation is where an individual is placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario to have their competences assessed. To extract evidence from work, a candidate collects physical or intellectual evidence of learning outcomes. This may relate to work situations or voluntary activities. This evidence forms the basis of a validation of competences by a third party.
- Portfolio method: using a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing an individual’s skills and competences in different ways. In the validation of informal and non-formal learning, assessment encompasses the validation of competences acquired regardless of any structured education and/or training processes. The assessment consists of a validation of

what is described in the employment specifications (or occupational standards). The quality procedures have to be robust to ensure that the competence assessed can actually be reliable and transferable.

The validation of informal and non-formal learning can also:

- Improve access to and efficiency in the formal education system. Providing direct ways to gain formal qualifications or 'door openers' to education courses and so avoid repetition and inefficiencies in the education system is a key reason for validating informal and non-formal learning. Several countries have introduced validation to make mobility easier and provide individuals with a 'second chance' to reach their full learning potential. These developments are closely linked to efforts to open up qualifications to a wider range of learning outcomes and learning settings, in many cases leading the development of national qualifications frameworks.
- Support economic factors. Labour markets have had to become more flexible and have innovation, with ensuing challenges for the development of paid and unpaid workers. Validation can be used to address needs in different economic sectors, such as skills shortages or compliance with regulations regarding professional qualifications. Increasingly, private sector stakeholders - social partners as well as individual companies – recognise the benefits of validation. Validation is increasingly used for staff development and to ensure the most effective allocation of resources within the business.

It is vital that new qualifications systems in the Sport and Active Leisure sector support the millions of workers who are currently employed across Europe. Current professionals must be afforded the same opportunities for recognition of skills, mobility of labour and career progression as those new graduates obtaining new formal qualifications with level and credit, linked to the EQF.

It is especially important that current professionals are able to access Registers of Professionals if these are in place in any sub-sector of sport so that they are not disadvantaged in the job market. Often these workers will be the most skilled and experienced workers in the sector. Current professionals will have a wide variety of training, qualifications and experience.

Qualifications obtained in the past may not exist any more or may have been obtained in any country in the world. Skills and knowledge will have been gained and built up often over many years. The consideration of the principles of validation of informal and non-formal learning will allow all these things to be taken into account when formulating a sector qualifications strategy.

#### **4.4.1. The European Register of Exercise Professionals**

The European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) is an independent process for the regulation of all instructors, trainers and teachers working across Europe in the exercise and fitness industry. Through its quality assurance process EREPS recognises that exercise professionals are qualified to do their job giving consumers, employers and partners in medical professions the necessary level of confidence in their professionalism and a structure for increased mobility of workers. Registration signifies that an exercise professional has met prescribed minimum standards of good practice, including the adoption of a Code of Ethical Practice and that they are committed to raising standards through a process of continuing professional development. EREPS is regulated by the EHFA Standards Council using an accepted European qualification framework which describes the knowledge, skills and competencies exercise professionals need to achieve registration. The Standards Council is responsible for the accreditation process for the training providers ([www.ehfa.eu](http://www.ehfa.eu)).

Further information regarding the terminology "Register of Professionals" can be found in the CLO2 report entitled "Feasibility for a European Register of Professionals in the outdoors".

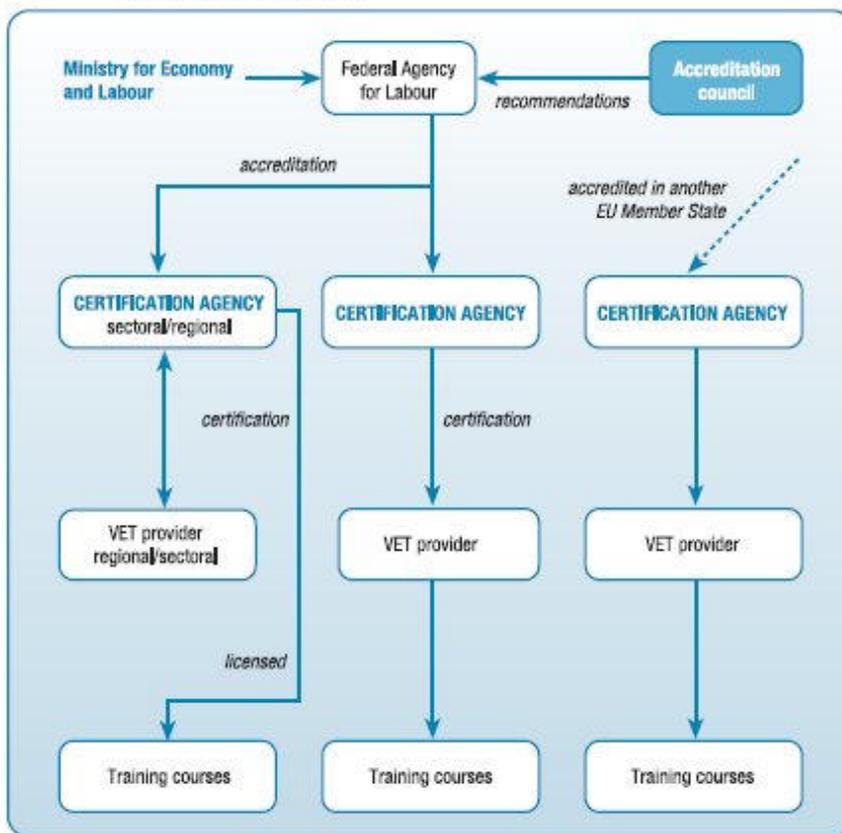
## **5. NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ACCREDITATION**

The following section describes some national examples of accreditation and their current state of implementation. These paragraphs and figures have been taken from a Cedefop 2009 document, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in VET.

**5.1. Germany**

VET providers have to apply for their certification and for the licensing of their courses to a private agency, which must be accredited by the national body. Certification agencies can apply for nationwide accreditation but also for accreditation that is limited to a specified economic or educational sector or regional territory. Accreditation of certification agencies is temporary, only for a period of three years at the most. Additionally, every year the system for quality assurance and quality development has to be verified by the national accreditation body.

Figure 2. The German framework for quality assurance and quality development in VET



Source: Erwin Seyfried.

Figure 5, The German framework for quality assurance and quality development in VET (Cedefop, 2009).

An accreditation council has also been established to advise the national accreditation body and to draft recommendations for accreditation and certification procedures. This council has nine members: representatives from both the Federal Ministry of Economy and Labour and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research a representative from the *Länder*, trade unions, employer organisations, organisations of VET providers, and three independent scientific experts.

To benefit from public funding, VET providers must be certified by an accredited certification agency and their training courses must be licensed. VET providers can apply for nationwide certification, for training activities in certain economic or educational sectors or for training activities in certain regions. To pass the certification procedure, VET providers have to prove their financial efficiency and educational capacity, and to fulfill a number of detailed requirements, including:

- The capacity to support the integration of their trainees into employment;
- The qualifications, professional experience and participation in further training of teachers and trainers;
- An efficient system for quality assurance and quality development including:
  - i. Customer orientation;
  - ii. Continuous evaluation of training courses based on the use of indicators and measurement;
  - iii. Continuous improvement of training provision;
- Cooperation with external experts for quality development. Providers have to demonstrate that they fulfill further criteria for licensing training courses to be funded with public money, having taken into consideration:
  - i. The preconditions of proposed training target groups;
  - ii. Their perspectives for integration into employment;
  - iii. Organisation of learning processes preparing for a recognised graduation, or at least part of this;
  - iv. Clearly defined time frame for the training course, including adequate practical working experience.

The certification agency determines which VET providers are to be certified and licensed. In the case of a negative decision, the VET provider can subsequently improve the criteria which had not been accepted within three months; if not, the application will be rejected. Following a positive decision, a certificate is granted by the certification agency and can be used by the VET provider as a label for quality in its information and marketing activities.

Certification is always limited for a maximum period of three years. Every year, however, a monitoring audit has to be carried out by the certification agency, focused on the VET provider's quality management system. From a European perspective it is interesting to note that agencies accredited in a similar procedure in another EU Member State are of parallel status to agencies certified in Germany. In the German system the State or semi-State organisations are not involved in accreditation of VET institutions, offering opportunities for further deliberations on the education system. Together with the possibility for VET providers to choose freely the certification agency they would like to cooperate with, the German system is quite advanced as a highly self-governed educational system. With the recognition of certification agencies accredited in foreign countries, it can be classified as being fit for a European approach.

## 5.2. Ireland

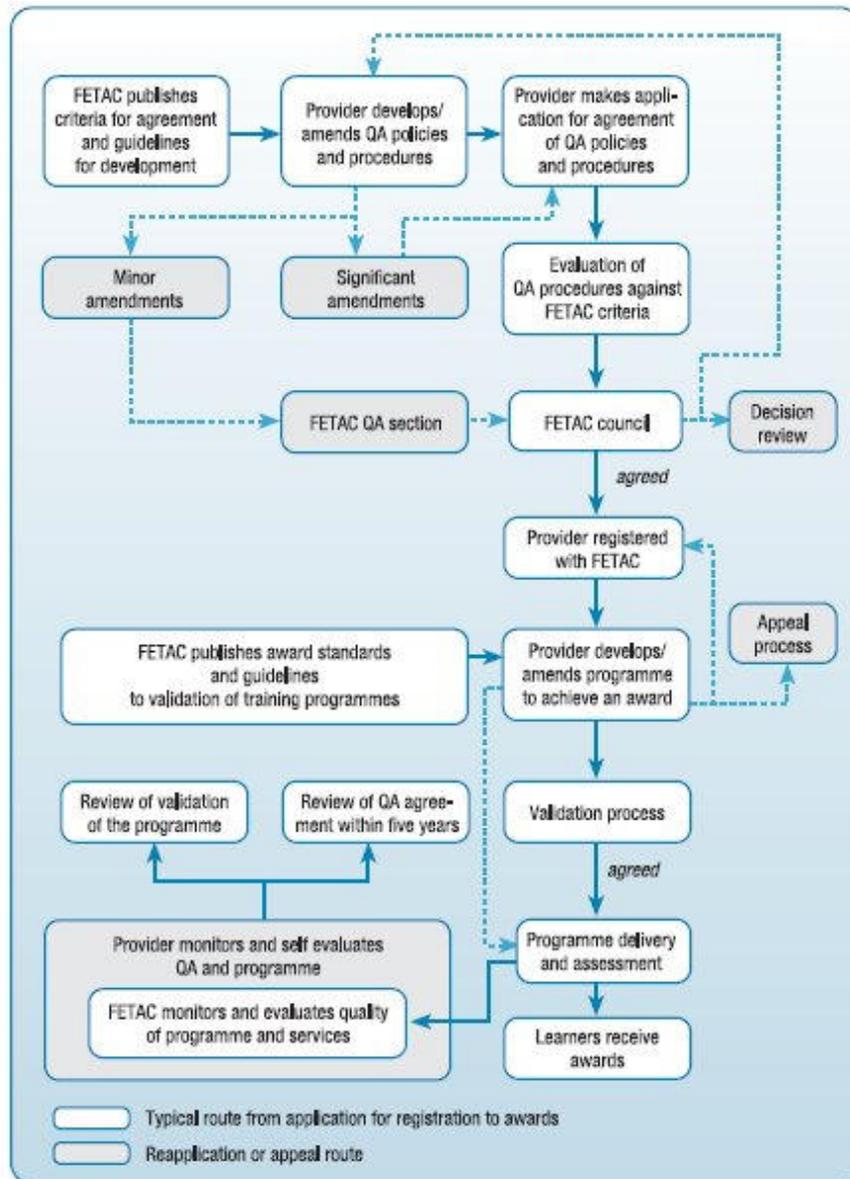
In Ireland, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999 created a new legislative framework for a more coherent high quality VET system. In 2001, the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) was established as the single national awarding body for further education and training (Cedefop, 2005). The awards are publicly recognised qualifications of the national qualification framework (NQF). FETAC makes awards to learners on a broad range of programmes offered by different types of VET providers and has a comprehensive strategy to assure the quality of the programmes leading to its awards. This strategy involves three coordinated separate functions, including elements of quality assurance, formal accreditation and continuous monitoring (FETAC, 2008, p. 5):

- All VET providers offering FETAC awards are required to have a quality assurance system agreed by FETAC. A provider must be able to demonstrate its capacity to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of programmes and services it offers to learners. Providers who demonstrate this capacity are registered with FETAC and may offer awards from the national framework of qualifications (at levels 1 to 6);
- FETAC validates programmes submitted by VET providers whose quality assurance procedures have been agreed. Validation is seen as the process by which a programme is evaluated, before it is delivered, and to ensure that the programme can provide a learner with the opportunity to achieve a specific award;
- FETAC monitors and evaluates programmes along and after their delivery by providers.

Monitoring consists of multifaceted information on providers, programmes, services and the quality assurance systems which support them. If the evaluation of this information indicates it is necessary,

either validation of the programme or agreement on the quality assurance procedures can be reviewed.

An overview of the Irish accreditation system, including the three subsystems for quality assurance agreement, programme validation and national monitoring, is given in the following illustration.



Source: FETAC.

Figure 6, The Irish framework for quality assurance and quality development in VET (Cedefop, 2009).

The Irish policy is to agree VET provider procedures for quality assurance where those procedures demonstrate the provider's commitment and capacity to maintain and improve the quality of its programmes and services. This approach is intended to give the providers both increased autonomy and responsibility. The capacity to assure the quality of a programme forms the basis of registration with FETAC.

Providers with agreed quality assurance procedures can register with FETAC and apply for programme validation. This is a specification of how that provider will enable a group of learners to achieve a particular award. Another critical aspect of the programme relates to how the learners in the programme will be assessed. FETAC examines the programme to ensure that the requirements for the award are included and that it is a valid programme; this is done before that programme is offered to learners. In this respect, validation has a preventive function, removing problems before they happen and improving the programme design whenever necessary.

A registered provider with a validated programme delivers the programme within its own internal quality assurance systems. This leads to assessment of the learners followed by certification. The provider's internal quality assurance must continually monitor the quality of provision. In addition, regular evaluations of the programme by staff and learners should be done by an external person. Further, these evaluations must link to a continuous improvement plan. Finally, FETAC monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of a provider's quality assurance procedures, placing particular emphasis on the validity, fairness and consistency of its assessment procedures and output.

Monitoring activities carried out by FETAC do not try to alter the importance of a providers own quality assurance, but seek to support it and want to ensure that it is achieving its purpose of quality maintenance and improvement. Using this information, FETAC will review each provider agreement for registering within a maximum period of five years from the date of initial agreement (Cedefop, 2005).

### 5.3. Italy

In 2001, the Italian Ministry of Labour approved a decree on the quality of VET, introducing an accreditation system for VET providers financed by the regional authorities. Compulsory minimum requirements have been defined at national level with the cooperation of all parties concerned and regional governments have put this system in place over recent years. Regional VET in Italy is largely based on a market system. Every year, regional governments tender for VET providers able to run courses for initial and continuing training which meet the demands of students and employers.

This system is very flexible because it is changed each year to meet new demands. However, it is difficult every year to build a structure that can accommodate more than 500 000 students and to choose the best VET providers among the broad supply. Previously, the Italian VET system had not established precisely parameters for how training activities should be performed nor standards of reference for either supply or output of training. Apart from a few exceptions in certain regions which had adopted certain forms of regulation, Italy's VET system was extremely varied. A number of training bodies, especially in northern Italy, had overcome this shortcoming by obtaining certification under ISO-9000 standards.

However, while this type of certification offers some guarantee of management of the processes, normally little is said about the quality of training outputs. Further, it was felt that the ISO-9000 certification requires a series of procedures that threaten to introduce too much bureaucracy into the training structures, mainly with disadvantages for smaller VET providers. The solution was to draw up a set of minimum national criteria for the accreditation that regional governments could add to or expand according to regional or local needs. The aim was to ensure that all training providers applying for funding from regional governments are able to perform vocational training activities according to minimum quality standards. These minimum quality standards apply to three major types of training and vary accordingly:

- Full-time initial training and apprenticeship training for students up to the age of 18 years;
- Higher training: all initial training pathways for students over 18 years of age;

- Continuing training, which also includes apprenticeship training for students over the age of 18.

The minimum requirements that training providers must fulfill to be accredited relate to the following aspects:

- General management of the institution;
- Financial situation of the institution;
- Staff characteristics for teaching, training and administration;
- Effectiveness and efficiency of previous training activities;
- Links and contacts (to schools, employers, employment services, municipal authorities, NGOs, etc.) at local level.

For each of these five criteria the national decree sets down quantitative and qualitative indicators that have to be measured and assessed, parameters stating the level of the quantitative data and the characteristics of the qualitative information, and indices setting the thresholds of the quantitative parameters or fixing requirements and conditions for the qualitative parameters. It is up to the regional governments to assess whether these requirements are fulfilled. Only the VET providers that can successfully demonstrate that they achieve the minimum level required are allowed to take part in regional tenders. They enter a regional register of accredited institutions that is updated each year and vocational training activities will only be assigned to providers appearing in that register. The Lombardy region identifies best performing providers and has a ranking system, moving from accreditation based on minimum standards towards competition and improvement in quality (De Nardo, 2008 & Cedefop 2009).

## 6. SECTORAL EXAMPLES FOR ACCREDITATION

### 6.1. Example model from the Health and Fitness sector

Most areas of sport and active leisure including fitness instruction and coaching are highly practical and it is reasonable that nobody is allowed to enter these sectors until they have been assessed in practical fitness instruction or coaching. The element of practical assessment required can be determined by the sector in the Common Assessment Strategy and verified via the 3rd party verification system adopted by the sector (EHFA, 2008).

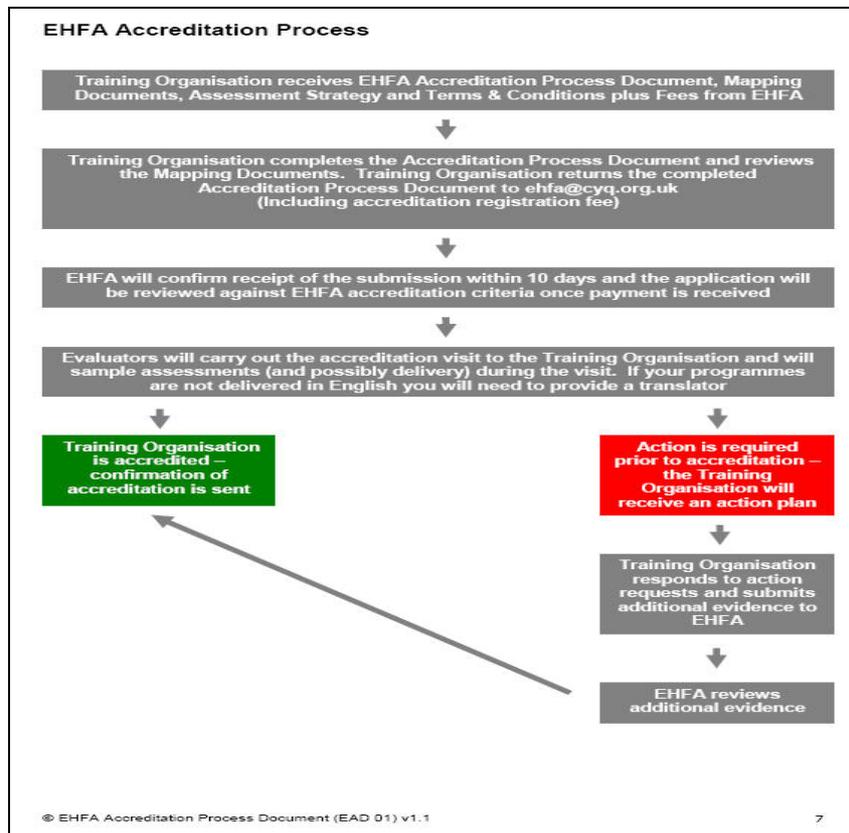


Figure 7: EHFA accreditation process

EHFA, the European Health & Fitness Association, is a not-for-profit organisation representing the interests of the sector. EHFA is a standards setting body of the health and fitness industry in Europe and promotes best practice in instruction and training. EHFA currently represents over 9,000 health clubs and leisure centres and 17 national associations spread across 23 countries. Membership is open to all stakeholders, public or private, including operators and suppliers, training providers and accreditation institutions. The full suite of accreditation documents can be found on the EHFA website ([www.ehfa.eu](http://www.ehfa.eu)).

Fitness is the only sector so far to implement an independent accreditation process. Their strategy is not to rate one training provider against another but purely to identify that the training programme will deliver the competent individual against the standards set.

In this way it doesn't matter whether the provider is from the private sector, higher education or an employer's own specific training programme. The process is the same and makes no judgement about the content of the specific programme which is outside the remit of the standards produced at the European level, thus, a three-year degree programme can be assessed as easily as a six month VET programme.

The Committee on Accreditation for the Exercise Sciences (CoAES) was established in April 2004 under the auspices of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs

(CAAHEP). The primary role of the CoAES is to establish standards and guidelines for academic programmes that facilitate the preparation of students seeking employment in the health, fitness, and exercise industry. The secondary role of the CoAES is to establish and implement a process of self-study, review, and recommendation for all programmes seeking CAAHEP accreditation ([www.coaes.org](http://www.coaes.org)).

**6.2. Example model from Hotel and Restaurant Services**

The model for accreditation for Hotel and Restaurant Services was developed by the Leonardo da Vinci project ‘Quality in VET-Schools’ (2002-2005). One product of the project was a 70 page document with detailed instructions in planning, developing, implementing and following-up accreditation. The working group comprised of professionals from Austria, Germany and Finland. They emphasise that accreditation is based on a voluntary assessment of the quality of study programmes and on a certification awarded on the basis of this assessment. This model has been published and disseminated but there is no report available on practical implementation so far.

The diagram below presents the process through which an educational organisation must pass to achieve accreditation.

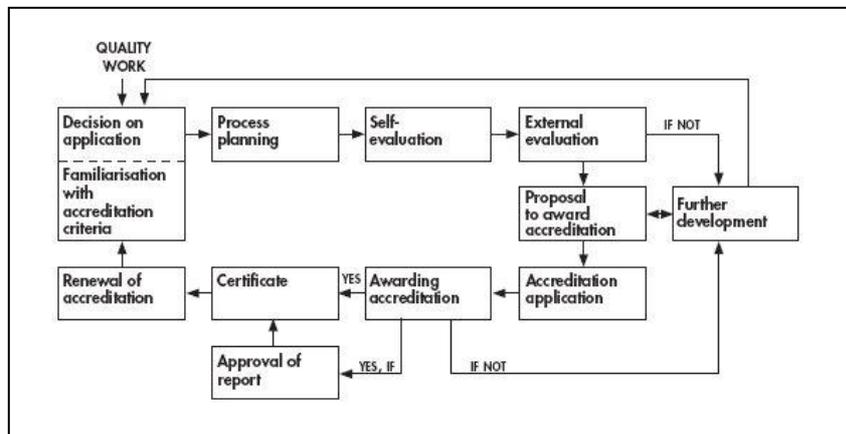


Figure 8, Accreditation model from Hotel and Restaurant services

**7. RANGE OF RELEVANT ACCREDITATION MODELS FOR THE OUTDOORS**

The current situation in outdoors sector VET varies considerably in CLO2 partner countries.

The Estonian qualification system has 8 levels identical to the EQF level descriptors. The outdoors sector providers are classified as a part of the Tourism sector and a considerable amount of the initiative for development comes from a non-profit organisation called the Estonian Ramblers Association. There are qualifications at EQF levels 4 to 8, and over 100 people have obtained a coach’s qualification within Rambling. There are seven existing degree level qualifications covering Tour Operator, Tourist Courier, Wilderness Guide and Rural Tourism Entrepreneur roles.

In Lithuania there are no training programmes leading to outdoors qualifications, but according to the Lithuanian State Department database, there are 68 training programmes within the Tourism, Recreation and Leisure sector. Most of these are vocational programmes (n=47), with 17 at degree level and 4 at Masters level (EQF 7).

In Finland, Belgium and Hungary there are between 40 and 60 credit modules as a part of Bachelors or Masters degrees in Physical Education studies. In Finland, the vocational training programmes including outdoor studies at EQF level 5 are a vocational qualification in Physical Education and a further education qualification in Physical Education. There are more specific programmes in the outdoors for Wilderness Guiding, a basic degree in Nature and the Environment and a basic degree in Tourism. All these programmes are competence based qualifications and the skills demonstrations / proficiency tests are organised by a qualification committee (consisting of the employer, employees

and the training provider). The assessments for young students and for adults are implemented according to the instructions of the Board of Education.

More information on these training systems is available on these internet pages:

- Estonia [www.kutsekoda.ee](http://www.kutsekoda.ee)
- Finland [www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi) & [www.kka.fi](http://www.kka.fi)
- Belgium [www.ond.vlaanderen.be](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be) & [www.nvao.net](http://www.nvao.net)
- Lithuania [www.skvc.lt](http://www.skvc.lt) & [www.krpmc.lt](http://www.krpmc.lt)
- Hungary [www.szmm.gov.hu](http://www.szmm.gov.hu) & [www.nive.hu](http://www.nive.hu)
- Ireland [www.Fetac.ie](http://www.Fetac.ie)
- UK [www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk) & [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com)

### 7.1. CLO2 example model

The following diagram offers one possible model for an outdoors sector accreditation process.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the CLO2 project countries are at very different stages of progressing and implementing accreditation systems. As a starting point, there must be two different parties involved in any accreditation process: the VET provider and an external body which should be recognised and competent to perform the external assessment and to award accreditation as a result of positive evaluation. It is accepted that whenever an external assessment or evaluation takes place, some criteria and standards must be applied to arrive at a positive or negative decision. In the following illustration the tasks of the VET provider and the tasks of the body recognised to accredit VET organisations or VET programmes are described step by step.

Before applying for accreditation the VET provider will have to make sure that the staff of the organisation are adequately empowered and involved to contribute to the process, as any application involves self-reporting and self-assessment.

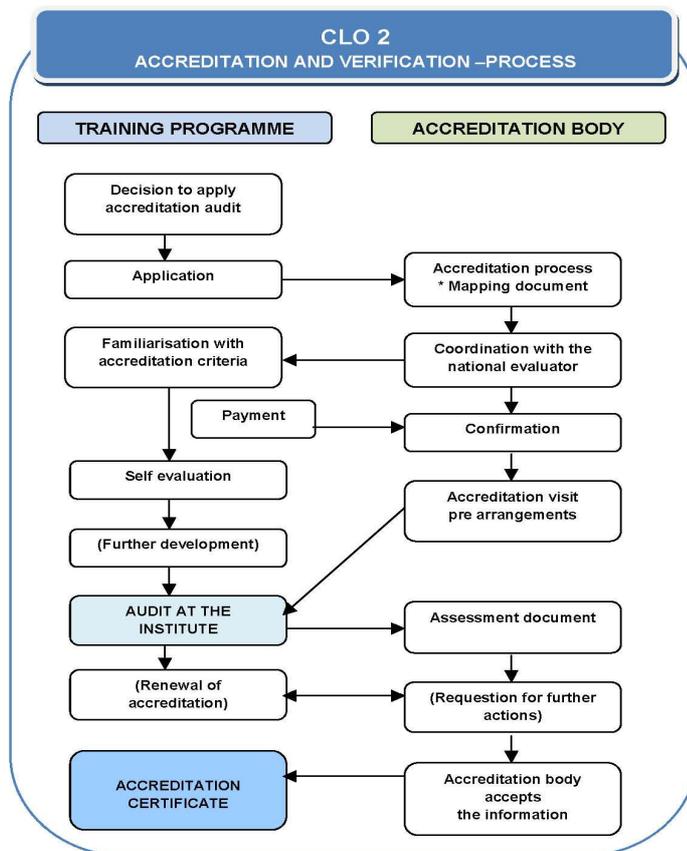


Figure 9: One example of an outdoors sector accreditation process

This diagram is relevant at the European level or directly at the national level. This process could be managed from the European level to the sectoral national level of individual member states by a European body suitably positioned to administer the task. But currently, such a group does not exist within Europe with suitable coverage of all the outdoors sector structures. It would also be possible to manage any process at a national level directly by any competent body. For it to be a success, the composition of any European group is critical and it must be composed of representatives from the whole sector with a range of different of stakeholder types.

After the VET provider has submitted an application to the accreditation body, an external evaluation will follow. Self -assessment reports written by VET providers will be the starting point for any external evaluation. It is not necessary for the accreditation body to carry out the assessment on its own; in most cases this task will be delegated to a group of VET experts in the field of training. Sometimes those independent experts will also include peers, i.e. representatives from other VET providers in the same field. Other members of the evaluation group may represent the learners, the social partners, equality organisations or other representative groups from society.

If the result of the evaluation is negative, accreditation will be denied and the VET provider will have to prepare and apply again after having improved its organisational structures and the quality of its training against the accreditation criteria. The decision of the evaluating body will normally include advice and recommendations on necessary changes. In some countries an external body, linked to the accreditation body, may offer professional support to providers in overcoming identified deficits.

In other cases, when the result of the external evaluation is borderline, some additional improvements will be required of the VET providers. These requirements could either be of a binding nature or, when less serious, consist of recommendations for improvement only. In both cases the VET provider will have to demonstrate via an improvement report that the relevant changes have been made so that a positive proposal for accreditation can be made by the body charged with carrying out the external evaluation. Following a positive evaluation and proposal for accreditation, the VET provider will be awarded its accreditation and the VET programme in question will receive a quality certificate. This certificate can be used for marketing activities by the VET provider to potential customers. A quality certificate is never issued for an unlimited period of time. A renewal of accreditation has to be made after a specified time span, normally around five years, although this renewal is often more of a 'light touch' procedure than for the initial accreditation. In renewal procedures it is mainly the adequateness of the internal self-assessment or quality management system of the VET providers which are assessed (Cedefop, 2009).

## 7.2. European Peer Review Procedure

The peer reviewing model could also be used as the tool for a European accreditation model. European Peer Review is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed educational institution in its quality assurance and quality development efforts. The European Peer Review is a voluntary and formative evaluation procedure which has been developed for voluntary use by a large group of international VET providers/institutions. It has a formative, development-oriented function and puts particular emphasis on the promotion of continuing quality improvement.

An external group of experts, known as peers, is invited to assess the quality of different fields of the institution. This could include the quality of education and training provision of individual departments or of the entire organisation. During the evaluation process, the peers visit the reviewed institution. Peers are external but work in a similar environment and have specific professional expertise and knowledge of the evaluated subject. They are independent and "persons of equal standing" with those whose performance is being reviewed. [www.peer-review-education.net](http://www.peer-review-education.net)

Peer review has many advantages and benefits as an instrument of quality assurance and development. The assessed organisation can get critical yet sympathetic feedback on the quality of their VET provision from colleagues in the field. They can become acquainted with an external perspective, ascertaining the quality of their provision, presenting their strengths and showcasing good practice. The process will help to establish networks and cooperation with other VET providers, and allows organisations to obtain an external evaluation report on the quality of their training and education at a comparatively economical cost. [www.peer-review-education.net](http://www.peer-review-education.net)

Peer reviews can be organised in different ways, depending on the networks and resources available. A single peer review can be carried out by an outdoor training provider who wants to obtain some external feedback from peers and intends to network with other VET providers in an ad hoc and spontaneous way by making use of existing contacts. There need not be any further cooperation between the reviewed VET provider and the VET providers the peers come from.

Mutual peer reviews between two outdoor training providers are also possible, calling for stronger and steadier cooperation. For the most part, peer reviews are carried out in a network of three or more partners. All of this involves a more stable network and needs suitable structures and sufficient resources. The added-value of the network approach may be the synergies developed between the VET providers within the network. This could offer wider external recognition of the peer review approach and a higher chance of possible spin-offs in terms of further cooperative activities beyond the peer review. According to the peer review manual the peer reviews can be carried out in a larger network. A coordinating body will be needed to ensure high quality peer reviews and effective coordination of the network members. This function can also be assumed by one of the VET providers in the network. The tasks of this coordinating body comprise, for example, managing the network, coordinating the development of common procedures (guidelines and indicators), giving support and advice to the individual VET providers, selecting and training peers, and coordinating and monitoring the peer reviews.

The implementation of the peer review procedure comprises 4 phases; the preparatory phase, the peer visit, a draft report and an action plan for improvement.

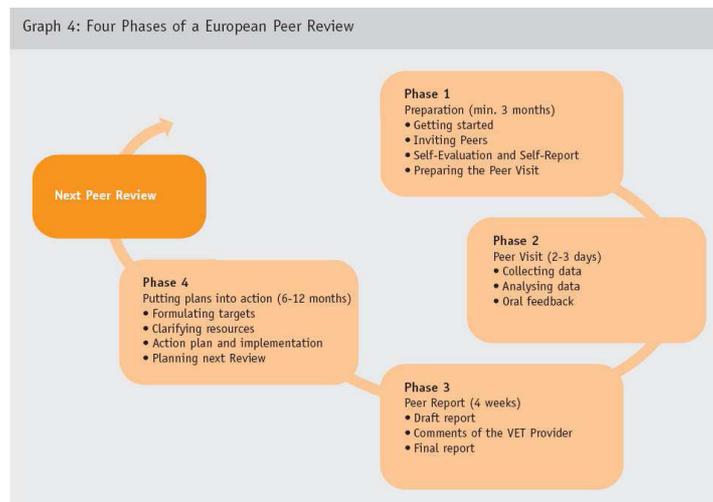


Figure 10: The European Peer Review Process

This peer review could be used as a tool with Memorandums of Understanding and Trust, and 3<sup>rd</sup> party accreditation processes at either European or national levels.



Figure 11, The Continuous Peer Review process

## 8. CONCLUSION

The CLO2 partnership group has looked at a range of accreditation systems. None of the existing systems are a perfect fit for the outdoors. A significant issue for the project is the absence of an acceptable overseeing body within the sector. Who could administer and maintain an accreditation system for the benefit of the whole European outdoors sector? This topic was discussed during the final event in Leuven, Belgium. It was clearly communicated that the accreditation process is of crucial importance and that it does need to be developed further. Interest was voiced by several partners in continuing the work and taking more responsibility for developing and implementing an outdoors accreditation system.

An existing peer review method in VET could work as a transition tool during any further development of an outdoors accreditation system. Two VET providers within the CLO2 partnership have had recent positive experience of and feedback on implementing a peer review system. In this example, the peer review was a part of a larger quality assessment process.

In the absence of an existing accreditation system for the outdoors, it was decided that any model proposed and/or developed should be simple. Maintaining a sound quality assurance approach is important, and has a strong impact on the sustainability and exploitation of the outcomes developed through the project. There would also be a need to co-operate with the recognised existing accreditation agencies at the national level, and to work with public, private, voluntary and not for profit organisations in partner countries.

National training accreditation systems for the Outdoor sector in Estonia, Lithuania, Finland and Belgium (Flanders) were also researched. In some cases, no recognised Outdoor qualification exists. The environment and people skill aspects of the outdoors are very important, but it was suggested that it would be necessary to look beyond Active Leisure for examples that would suit the specific nature of the outdoors. The CLO2 project group recommends that the development of an accreditation process is sufficiently complex to warrant a separate project. Good examples of accreditation do exist at the national level (Belgium has an extensive audit process for outdoors companies, and the UK also operates a licensing system) but transferring these examples to the wider European outdoors VET level in an acceptable, uniform manner is a weighty task with many questions that would need addressing.

It has become clear during the process that accreditation plays a crucial role in promoting mobility, co-operation, discussion, and mutual understanding at the European level. The discussion should continue with the national accreditation bodies, and the project's partners should promote the common interests that the project has raised at every opportunity. It would be beneficial for the sector to plan, develop and promote a common outdoors strategy for the future.

Several models of accreditation have been highlighted and they now need to be tested and analysed in more depth. The objective of this work was to look for existing systems of accreditation and propose a range of relevant scenarios for the outdoors. To progress this work, it is necessary to further consult with main stakeholders from all of the sub-sectors of the outdoors, and undertake practical testing of the most suitable models within the context of the sector through a range of EU countries.

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