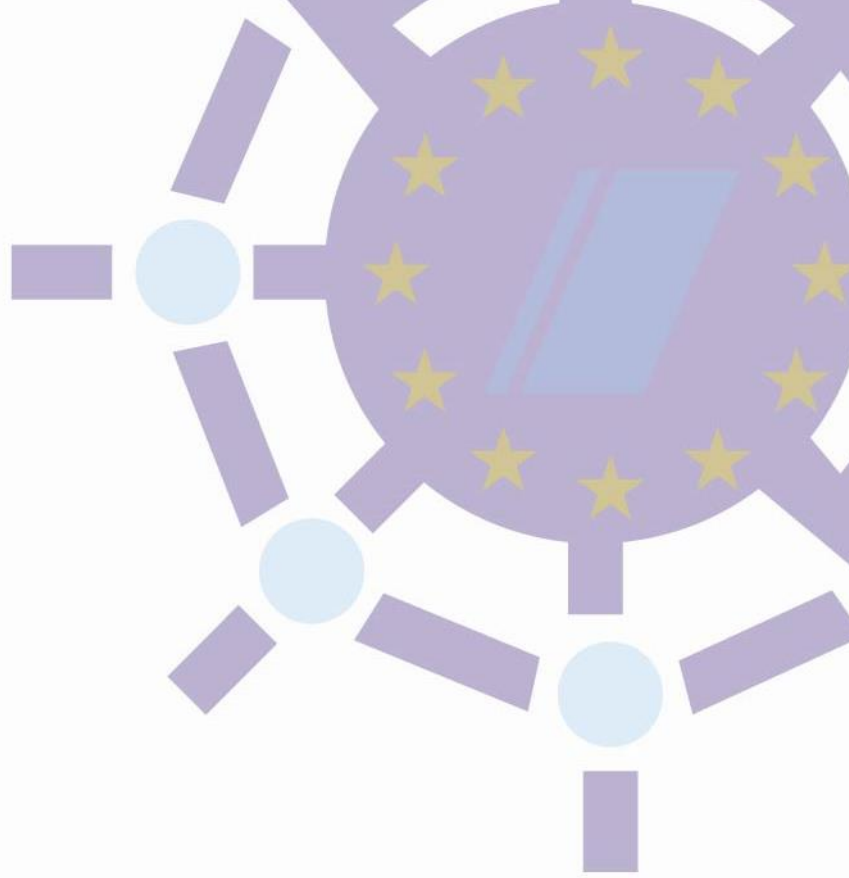# Quality Assurance Guidelines

European Coast Guard Functions Academies Network Project
ECGFA NET - PHASE III
Work Package 4
2018-2019

Work Package 4 Coordinator: Italian Coast Guard

External Expert: CIMEA – Italian ENIC-NARIC centre

Table of contents

Acronyms

List of abbreviations and acronyms commonly used within the document:

CGF: Coast Guard Functions

CIMEA: Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence

ECGFA-Net: European Coast Guard Functions Academy Network for European Sectoral Qualification's Framework for Coast Guarding

ECVET: European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

ECTS: European Credit Transfer System

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

ENIC: European Network for National Information Centres

EQF: European Qualification Framework

ESG: European Standard and Guidelines

EU: European Union

ILO: International Labour Organisation

NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

QA: Quality Assurance

QF: Qualifications Framework

SQF: Sectoral Qualifications Framework

SQFCGF: Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Coast Guard Functions

VET: Vocational Education and Training

WP4: Work Package four

Introduction

This document is drafted in the framework of phase III of the ECGFA-Net project. It is aimed to provide guidelines for the quality assurance mechanisms to be introduced as part of the establishment and management of the Coast Guard Functions Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFCGF). It should be read in combination with the other documents produced by WP4 of ECGFA-Net and specifically the *"Working Paper for adoption and management of the Framework"* and *"Working Paper for adoption of the Framework at National level and integration into NQF"*.

This has been developed by the Italian Coast Guard with the support of CIMEA, the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence.

This paper provides a strategic overview on the architecture of the quality assurance mechanisms to be adopted as part of the SQF, as well as specific quality assurance requirements extrapolated from the experiences gained in other sectors and following the Recommendations of the European Qualifications Framework[1].

The present guidelines also reference and incorporate the results of a "Quality Assurance Questionnaire" completed on May 2019 by the ECGFA-Net members.

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[1] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, OJ C 111, 6.5.2008. Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, OJEU C189/15, 15.06.2017

1. Quality assurance: elements

European qualifications frameworks can facilitate the comparison and recognition of qualifications across Europe on the basis of mutual trust. Quality assurance and quality development are crucial to the implementation of qualifications frameworks. Indeed, qualifications frameworks make credible contributions to mutual trust when they are supported by strong quality assurance systems. Only in this way can we have confidence that the qualifications are fit for purpose and that those holding qualifications can perform the tasks that society proposes to them, including participating in lifelong learning and working for others or creating new employment for themselves and others[2].

The national and the international community are asked have confidence in the SQFCGF. Information and awareness on the national systems of quality assurance and the definition of minimum quality requirements are important issues in order to foster trust among stakeholders involved in the SQFCGF.

Quality assurance comprises administrative and procedural activities implemented in the national quality systems so that requirements and goals for Coast Guard qualifications are fulfilled. It is the systematic measurement, comparison with a standard, monitoring of processes and an associated feedback loop that confers error prevention. At national level, this can be contrasted with quality control, which is focused on process output. The European Union developed a quality assurance reference framework which comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation/ assessment and review/revision) based on a selection of quality criteria, descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels. The aim is not to introduce new standards but to support Member States' efforts, whilst preserving the diversity of their approaches. The framework is regarded as a 'toolbox', from which the various users may choose those descriptors and indicators that they consider most relevant to the requirements of their particular quality assurance system[3].

The transparency of Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms in training provision at national level is strategic for enhancing mutual trust between Coast Guard Authorities, in view of sectoral and international comparisons. The value and credibility of the SQF at national level and its relevance in education and training activities is at the basis for the credibility of the SQF as a European/international meta-framework.

Consequently, the establishment of the SQFCGF and related guidelines shall also include reference to its QA elements. This does not include prescribed action for participating Coast Guard Authorities as the QA elements are aimed at identifying the existing shared minimum quality standards.

In general terms, a sectoral QA system should enable guaranteeing the respect of minimum QA standards behind the Coast Guard education and training paths, facilitating the referencing process of the national qualifications to the SQFCGF. At the same time, guidelines establish a

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[2] Conclusions for follow-up from the Irish Presidency Conference on quality assurance in qualifications frameworks, March 2013
[3] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, OJEU C155/1, 08.07.2009

reference instrument to help European Coast Guard Authorities to promote and monitor continuous improvement of training systems.

QA is composed of principles, standards, management practices, areas of intervention and concrete measures.

2. Quality Assurance: principles and standards

Quality assurance is crucial to improve the relevance of Coast Guard qualifications, facilitating the validation of formal and non-formal learning, and promoting confidence in Europe's Coast Guard qualifications on a global scale.

In the context of National Qualifications Frameworks, quality assurance has been defined as the "Processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards"[4].

The EU Quality Assurance in vocational education and training is a tool based on the 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council[5]. The Recommendation invites Member States to use a series of indicative descriptors and indicators to support and develop their VET systems. The tool provides guidance on how to develop quality assurance systems and contains examples of different approaches used by Member States.

The quality assurance of the qualifications conferred at national level is a prerequisite for referencing those qualifications to the EQF.

Annex IV of the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) specifically refers to 10 principles for qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF. It is recommended that all qualifications with an EQF level are quality assured to enhance trust in their quality and level. In accordance with national circumstances and taking into account sectoral differences, quality assurance of qualifications related with an EQF level should[6]:

1. address the design of qualifications as well as application of the learning outcomes approach;
2. ensure valid and reliable assessment according to agreed and transparent learning outcomes-based standards and address the process of certification;
3. consist of feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement;
4. involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages of the process;
5. be composed of consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
6. be an integral part of the internal management, including sub-contracted activities, of bodies issuing qualifications with an EQF level;
7. be based on clear and measurable objectives, standards and guidelines;
8. be supported by appropriate resources;
9. include a regular review of existing external monitoring bodies or agencies, carrying out quality assurance;
10. include the electronic accessibility of evaluation results.

A further reference is provided by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework[7],

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[4] An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers. Tuck, R., Skills and Employability Department. International Labour Office (ILO), 2007
http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2007/107B09_57_engl.pdf
[5] Sub infra, note n. 5
[6] These common principles are fully compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and with European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET).
[7] Sub infra, note n. 5

including quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators. Its aim is not to introduce new standards, but to support Member States' efforts, whilst preserving the diversity of their approaches. It proposes three common quality criteria to support Member States, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the Framework. The quality criteria are:

- Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators
- Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles
- Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement
- Review

Whilst the SQFCGF is not strictly related to higher education, the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG) for higher education is another relevant source in providing "*a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance [in higher education]. The ESG are not standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes qualifications frameworks, ECTS and diploma supplement that also contribute to promoting the transparency and mutual trust [in higher education in the EHEA].*"

Drawing on the ESG (2015), further principles can be detailed as follows:

- training providers/institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- quality assurance responds to the diversity of training provision systems, institutions, programmes and trainees;
- quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
- quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of trainees, all other stakeholders and society.

When translating quality assurance principles into practices, standards for quality assurance have to be applied at three interlinked levels (EGS, 2015):

- internal quality assurance;
- external quality assurance;
- quality assurance agencies.

With regard to *internal quality assurance*, the following standards apply:

- Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders;
- Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes and the qualifications references to the applicable QF;
- Trainees' engagement and involvement in each phase of training planning, delivery and evaluation;

- Pre-defined and published student admission, progression, recognition and certification:
- Quality assured trainers' recruitment and engagement criteria;
- Appropriate training resources and facilities, including for the management of information;
- Appropriate communication and dissemination of information;
- On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes;
- Cyclical external quality assurance.

With regard to the *external quality assurance*, the following standards apply:
- It should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes;
- It should be fit for purpose;
- It should follow a process which is reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. It normally includes: a self-assessment or equivalent, an external assessment with site visit, a report and a consistent follow-up;
- It should be performed in a professional way and include a *peer-review;*
- Judgement should be based on findings and pre-agreed criteria and include proper reporting;
- Appeal and complaints criteria shall also be included in the external quality analysis.

With regard to the *standard for quality assurance agencies*, the following standards apply:

- agencies shall perform quality assurance as their core business and mission, with consistent resources and policy;
- they shall have a recognised official status;
- they shall be independent and have internal codes of conduct;
- they shall publish thematic reports and analysis;
- they also shall be subjected to cyclical external assessment.

Whilst the standards and guidelines above relate to the quality assurance of qualifications, the underlying principles can be considered as equally relevant to the quality assurance of the Qualifications Framework development process. The development of the EQF models this approach, where an advisory group of international experts was established to act as a technical coordination body that oversees the implementation of the framework and provide coherence to the various processes.

The approach of the EQF advisory group is considered here to identify other quality assurance elements including the identification of quality areas and quality assurance measures. The following paragraphs provide suggestions on how to design a quality assurance mechanism for the SQFCGF.

3. Quality assurance management: the Advisory Group

On the basis of the EQF experience, the establishment of an Advisory Group for quality assurance measures, including definitions, of the SQFCGF is strongly recommended. Its main role should be the control of compliance checks on the minimum quality standards, to be identified. At a later stage, this group of experts could support and oversee national stakeholders in developing procedures to be followed when referencing their education levels to SQF minimum quality requirements in in order to develop mutual trust between them. The Advisory Group could also support the drafting of Quality Assurance Guidelines and minimum quality standards for Coast Guard educational sectors.

This group of experts could consist of representatives from EU Coast Guard Authorities, different EU agencies, social partners and various other stakeholders, such as representatives of educational/training institutions in this sector.

The Apex body of the SQFCGF is asked to provide a specific mandate to the Advisory Group with clear, defined objectives and deadlines.

It is suggested that the Advisory Group meets periodically. Within the Advisory Group, sub-groups may be established based on technical competences and/or to focus on specific themes, as well as on specific challenges.

4. Suggested areas for quality check for SGFCGF

Quality assurance concerns three main dimensions:

- the SQFCGF itself;
- the adoption of SQF at national level with a referencing to the European SQFCGF;
- and the appropriateness of both the SQFCGF and national SQF to provide a guide for increasing mobility and interoperability of CGF both at international and domestic level.

In addition, the quality of the SQF can be evaluated regarding the following main issues:

- **Alignment of the Learning Outcomes** in the SQF **with EQF and other SQFs** (where relevant), also with regard to policy or regulatory revision at European or International level, including for example to the Council Recommendations of 22 May 2017 on the EQF for lifelong learning. When applied to national SQF, the alignment refers also to the SQFCGF.
- **Coherence of the SQF as an overall framework**, and the **coherence of each learning outcome across the 4 levels** (EQF levels 4, 5, 6, 7). When applied to national SQF, referencing to lower EQF levels could be found.
- **Consistency** of the SQF, both internally (i.e. within the SQF) and externally (i.e. with reference to official documents).
- **Approach to the process** of developing the SQF, including the **representativeness** of the working group and the stakeholders involved, the **timing** and **controls** performed, the **wideness of the consultation process**, etc.

Even if those areas have been already addressed and will be addressed before the approval of the SQFCGF, having in mind that the Qualifications Framework is a living and flexible instrument, and it will influence and will be influenced by the later developments of SQFCGF at national level, the above-mentioned areas of quality check shall be revised regularly including after the adoption of the SQFCGF (at least once per year).

Considering that the SQFCGF is a meta-framework, the concrete quality assurance of the recognition of sectoral qualifications is rooted in the measures adopted at national level, as specified below.

5. Suggested measures for SQFCGF quality assurance

The use of the SQFCGF and its future implementation are strictly tied with SQFCGF capability to ensure a continuous consultation mechanism, both nationally with the operational organisation, and by an international dialogue and knowledge sharing with the Coast Guard authorities.

Quality assurance covers the development of qualifications, frameworks and standards, the delivery of training and the assessment/certification process.

The main measures of quality assurance at national level are:

- validation of qualifications and/or standards;
- accreditation and audit of education and training institutions;
- quality assurance of assessment leading to the award of qualifications.

In order to promote mutual trust and applicability, it is necessary to have full transparency on the qualifications released at national level and how they map on to the SQFCGF. To this end, information regarding the qualifications released at national level should be gathered and organised.

The website hosting the SQFCGF shall promote the dissemination of the European meta-framework but in the future, it can also be implemented, including references to the national frameworks and provide tools for comparisons of different countries/organisations/functions[8].

An initiative has been promoted by European Security and Defence College (ESDC) in the framework of the project aimed at drafting an SQF for Military Officer Profession (MILOF). They suggest the development of a database providing the following information on the military qualifications:

- Member State
- Name of the qualification (e.g. professional bachelor's degree in Land Force Military Leadership; Staff Officer Course)
- Name of the education/training institution awarding the qualification (including the webpage)
- Prerequisites/previous education/training required to study for this qualification (e.g. certificate of general secondary education or diploma of vocational secondary education)
- How the qualification is acquired (e.g. formal education; vocational training; participation in operations)
- Number of credits awarded under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- Number of credits awarded under the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)
- The duration of the programme leading to the above-mentioned qualification (in weeks)
- Level of National Qualification Framework
- Level of European Qualification Framework

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[8] The Training Portal of the European Coast Guard Functions Training Network is the current most suitable platform to host and promote the SQFCGF http://ecgff-trainingportal.eu/

- Level of operations at which the programme is primarily designed: low tactical, high tactical, operational, military strategic, or political strategic)
- Other information, as required (i.e. url of the training institutions/programmes…).

6. Current measures for quality assurance at national level

A questionnaire on quality assurance mechanism has been promoted by the Italian Coast Guard (Work Package 4 Coordinator) within the planned activities of the ECGFA-Net III project. The questionnaire concerning QA was launched by the Coordinator of WP4 on the 2nd of May 2019 and answers received by 10th June 2019 (see Annex 1).

The questionnaire was aimed at investigating the quality assurance mechanisms employed to confer qualifications related to Coast Guard Functions at national level.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather findings on the QA mechanism adopted by EGFA NET members and partners in order to identify the common minimum standards and procedures adopted at national level and provide guidelines for comparison with the SQFCGF.

To this end, the questionnaire investigated the following:

- the institutions charged with quality assurance, including accreditation system;
- the quality assurance tools used by each institution and at national / sectoral level;
- the frequency of the controls / revision concerning the quality assurance;
- the transparency and publicity of the QA adopted at national level.

An additional optional session at the end of the questionnaire concerned the general architecture of the national training system for Coast Guard functions and would help the WP4 team to better analyse the questions and identify differences between the different coast guard functions (if any).

Based on the answers received to the questionnaire, the following general conclusions can be shared:

- The national education and training system in the field of Coast Guard Functions is not organised in the same way in all the respondent countries;
- All the respondents are well aware of the existence of a NQF/SQF in their country,
- In the majority of cases, qualifications in CGF are assessed against learning outcomes, while the use of credit systems, including the ECTS, is still not used as standard. A certain concern on comparability exists, but it is mainly for internal comparison and based on statistical information (hours of training).
- With regard the overall regulation of national quality assurance mechanisms, the situation is even less homogeneous: while in general terms there are national and internal regulations, the roles, functions and mechanisms for quality assurance vary a lot from organization to organization and from country to country.
- In relation to quality assurance of the specific training programmes, evaluation is conducted regularly and involves many stakeholders. However, reviews are not published and/or made available for accountability, transparency or international comparability purposes.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- In terms of the adoption of the SQFCGF, there is awareness and implementation of quality assurance and evaluation measures amongst the organisations involved in Coast Guard functions training and qualifications.
- All of the Coast Guard authorities involved in the project value the QA in their training systems.
- There is little consistency in approach to QA between different organisations and countries. In addition, a more international (European) approach is encouraged.
- The use of the SQFCGF and its future implementation are strictly tied with SQFCGF capability to encompass a continuous consultation and cooperation mechanism, both nationally with the operational organisations, and internationally by promoting dialogue and knowledge sharing with the Coast Guard authorities.
- QA is a key tool to increase mutual trust and qualitatively appreciable developments of the SQFCGF.
- QA for SQFCGF does not have a prescriptive value in the training systems of the European Coast Guard Authorities.
- In order to promote mutual trust and applicability, it is necessary to have full transparency on the qualifications conferred at national level including how they map on to the SQFCGF.

Recommendations

Recommendation n. 1: The establishment of an Advisory group for quality assurance of the measures, is strongly recommended, both for the establishment and the management of the SQFCGF.

Recommendation n. 2: Considering that the SQFCGF is a meta-framework, the concrete quality assurance of the recognition of sectoral qualification is rooted in the measures adopted at national level.

Recommendation n. 3: The Advisory group is recommended to update and deepen information from the survey on the national quality assurance systems, in order to facilitate the cooperation and exchange of good practice, as well as establish reliable minimum quality standards for the SQFCGF.

Recommendation n. 4: Amid other communication and dissemination initiatives related to the adoption of the SQFCGF by the Apex Body, transparency and information related to quality assurance mechanisms should be addressed.

Key references

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in VET (EQAVET), 2009

Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015 Brussels, Belgium.

An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers. Tuck, R., Skills and Employability Department. International Labour Office (ILO), 2007

Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

Report on the outcomes of the "Questionnaire on Quality Assurance Mechanisms"

Introduction

This report informs on the findings of the questionnaire on quality assurance mechanisms promoted by the Italian Coast Guard (Work Package 4 Coordinator) within the planned activities of the European Coast Guard Functions Academies Network project phase III (ECGFA-Net III project).

In the context of ECGFA-Net project, a specific Work Package (WP4) was foreseen to develop the structure of a Coast Guard Functions Sectorial Qualification Frameworks (SQFCGF). During the previous phases, "*Basic elements and Key Recommendations for the development of SQFCGF*"[9] were identified, as well as the draft content of the SQFCGF in terms of learning descriptors per each of the coast guard functions and sub-activities.

One of the tasks of the ECGFA-Net III, namely *task n.4 of WP4 Work Plan - Drafting quality assurance elements/guidelines, is* aimed at providing guidelines on Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms for SQFCGF based on quality assurance mechanisms adopted at national level.

Consistently with this objective, a questionnaire concerning QA was launched by the Coordinator of WP4 on the 2nd May 2019.

This report summarises the analysis of the responses received by the 10th of June 2019.

Quality assurance questionnaire: concept, content and objectives

Consistently with its role of Coordinator of WP4, the Italian Coast Guard has been working since 2015 to develop the structure of a Coast Guard Functions Sectorial Qualifications Framework (SQFCGF), consistent with the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. For the development of the SQFCGF structure, they worked with a list of identified experts in training activities for Coast Guard Functions, named the "Sectoral Qualifications Framework Experts" (SQF Experts).

Some European agencies (EFCA, EMSA, FRA, Frontex) were involved as observers, in order to gather their suggestions and contributions during the implementation of the project.

In addition, the Italian Coast Guard is supported by external experts from CIMEA and the Italian ENIC-NARIC centre with outstanding experience in analysis, developing and promoting

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[9] The document is available at:
http://ecgff-trainingportal.eu/uploads/store/librarydoc/33/file/004a59be47.pdf

qualifications frameworks at European and international level.

As part of the SQFCGF, some quality assurance guidelines shall be provided as quality assurance in training systems is widely recognized, including by EU Institutions, as a fundamental aspect to foster trust among the partners and stakeholders of a SQF.

In order to enable transparency of process and achieve an inclusive and reliable output, a questionnaire on national quality assurance measures was launched on May 2nd, 2019.

The questionnaire was aimed at investigating the quality assurance mechanisms related to the conferring of qualifications related to Coast Guard Functions at national level.

The Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms in training provision at national level are aimed at enhancing the transparency and mutual trust in the context of sectoral and international comparison. The value and credibility of the SQF at national level and its relevance to education and training requirements is the basis for the credibility of SQF as a European/international meta-framework.

Further, the adoption of the SQFCGF and related guidelines shall also include reference to the QA measures adopted.

In general terms, a QA system should enable the continuous monitoring and checking of the quality of training provision and the conferring of qualifications referenced to the national qualifications framework and to the SQFCGF.

The QA is composed of tools, procedures and management practices.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather findings on the QA mechanism adopted by EGFA-Net members and partners in order to identify the common minimum standards and procedures adopted at national level and provide guidelines for comparison with the SQFCGF.

To this end, the questionnaire investigates the following:

- the institutions charged with quality assurance, including accreditation system;
- the quality assurance tools used by each institution and at national/sectoral level;
- the frequency of the controls/revision concerning the quality assurance;
- the transparency and publicity of the QA adopted at national level.

An additional optional question at the end of the questionnaire concerned the general architecture of the national training system for Coast Guard functions and would help the WP4 team to better analyse the responses to the questions and identify differences between the different coast guard functions (if any).

Information on quality assurance tools and mechanisms used by the organisations charged with Coast Guard functions is important in order to assess the strength of the basis of implementation of the SQFCGF at national level.

Consultation methodology

The questionnaire was implemented by the Italian Coast Guard, with the complementary support of CIMEA. A Google tool was selected to launch questionnaire and gather results as it was considered that the tool was accessible to all and user-friendly. The invitation to participate was sent by email, including a brief note on the purpose of the survey.

The questionnaire was sent to all the EGFA NET members and partners.

The questionnaire was addressed to personnel acting in the field of training in Coast Guard functions. However, the receiver of the invitation was invited to fill in the questionnaire with the support of colleagues involved with provision and quality assurance of training.

Participation in the research was voluntary. The identity of the respondent was necessary to register to the platform in order to fill in the questionnaire and provide the name of the respective organization. As such the research is not anonymous, but respondents details remain confidential.

The survey was launched via Google from the 2nd of May, 2019 and the initial deadline for submitting the contributions was fixed as the 15th of May, 2019. However, the survey remained open longer and the feedback has been analysed from responses received up until the 10th of June, 2019.

Results of the survey

a) Analysis of Contributors

The questionnaire was submitted to all the Project's Partners and also to the other ECGFF Members (as total 25 States), and 15 answers were received from 10 different countries. All the 11 Coast Guard functions are represented overall by all respondents:

PROJECT'S PARTNERS		Name of the Respondent Authority	REPLIES
1	CROATIA	Ministry of the Interior - Border police directorate	1
2	FINLAND	Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy	1
3	GERMANY	German Federal Police	1
4	GREECE	HCG	1
5	ITALY	VTMIS Training Centre/Italian Coastguard	1
6	POLAND	Maritime Office in Szczecin	1
7	PORTUGAL	Maritime Authority MARINHA Maritime Authority School GNR	4
8	ROMANIA	Romanian Coast Guard	1

9	SLOVENIA	Slovenian Maritime Administration	1
10	SPAIN	Guardia Civil Customs- Vigilancia aduanera National Authority Maritime Safety	3
ALL CONTRIBUTORS (countries)			15

Coast Guard Functions managed by the respondents of the questionnaire on quality Assurance.

Authority	COAST GUARD FUNCTIONS										
	Maritime safety, including vessel traffic management	Maritime, ship and port security	Maritime customs activities	Prevention and suppression of trafficking and smuggling and connected maritime LE	Maritime border control	Maritime monitoring and surveillance	Maritime environmental protection and response	Maritime SAR	Ship casualty and maritime assistance service	Maritime accident and disaster response	Fisheries inspection and control
Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
VTMIS Training Centre/Italian Coastguard	■	■				■	■	■	■	■	■
Portughese Maritime Authority (combined 4 respondents)	■	■		■	■	■	■	■		■	■
Spain (Guardia	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Civil + Vigilancia Aduaniera + Authority Maritime Safety (combined 3 respondents)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Greek HCG	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Maritime Office in Szczecin	■	■				■	■	■	■	■	
HR-Ministry of the Interior - Border police directorate					■						
German Federal Police					■						
Slovenian Maritime Administration	■	■				■		■	■	■	
Romanian Coast Guard	■			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

The national education and training system in the field of Coast Guard Functions is organized in a variety of ways in all the respondent countries, as showed by the graph below:
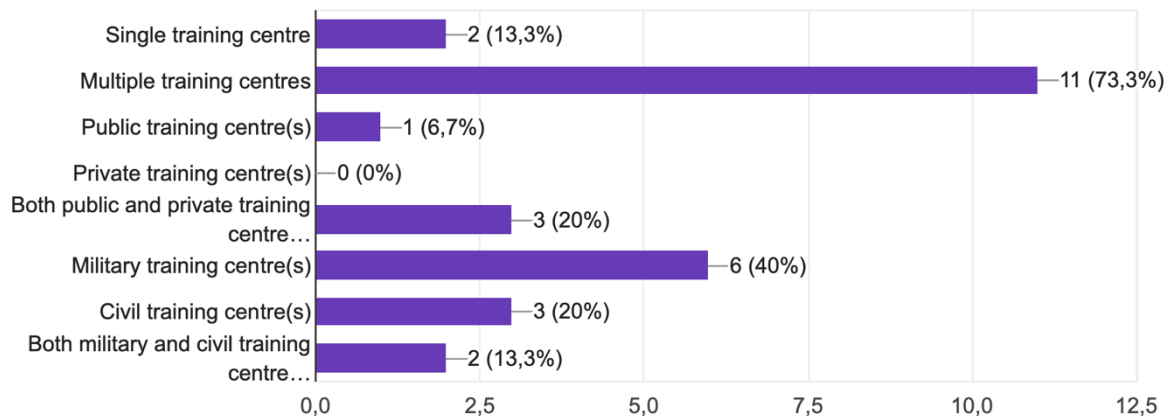
b) Existence of qualification frameworks (part I)

All the respondents are aware of the existence of a NQF/SQF in their country.

However, only 5 out of 15 respondents declared that there is a SQF for Coast Guard Functions in their country. In 3 cases, the SQF for Coast Guard functions is linked to the NQF (Portugal[10], Slovenia, Romania). In 1 case (Croatia) the SQF for CGF it is not linked to the NQF.

c) Characteristics of the training provided (part II)

The majority of respondents declared that qualifications in CGF are assessed against learning outcomes. However, there is still a 35% of cases where they are not.

The situation relating to the use of credit system is inverted: in only 5 cases the qualifications and/or training in CGF are translated into credits for comparability purpose.

Some of the organizations use other means for comparability purposes, namely the comparison of syllabus, the list of disciplines and number of hours of training for the courses available.

With regard to the duration of the qualifications conferred, 50% of the respondents stated that qualifications are released for a fixed term period (e.g. one year, two years...) while the remaining 50% refer that qualification are valid for life. This response indicated a conceptual difference across respondents in the concepts of qualifications, certification and licensing in terms of professional practice.

In 5 out of the 13 answers, respondents state that qualifications in CGF are referenced to EQF

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[10] It should be noted that the Portuguese respondent from Marinha said that there is no SQF for CGF in Portugal.

and in almost all these cases (Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Spain) the referencing process include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

With regard to the inclusion of non-traditional learning, 8 respondents stated that qualifications based on non-traditional learning (e.g. flexible learning paths, recognition of prior learning (RPL), open/distance learning) are treated in the same way as traditional qualifications. While the remaining 7 respondents stated that they are not.

In all cases, the recognition criteria for qualifications and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis and in most of the cases (11 out of 15) the status of the awarding institution and programme are accredited / recognized by competent authorities, thus ensuring that the programme is of sufficient quality and linked to a national education system.

d) Institutions charged with quality assurance, including accreditation system (part III)

The situation for the overall regulation of the quality assurance mechanism is less homogeneous among the respondents: half of the respondents stated that there is a national legislative act defining the architecture, roles and responsibilities of the quality assurance in training provision for CGF, while the other half stated that there is no such regulation framework.

In most of the cases (11) there is at least one National Authority in charge of quality assurance of training provision for CGF. The list of these authorities and their functions is provided in the table below.

PROJECT'S PARTNERS		Name of the Authority in charge of quality assurance	external organisation charged with quality assurance	role and mission of the (external) organisation charged with quality assurance
1	CROATIA	Ministry of the interior		According to the Law of border control and other Acts, flag control, boarding, smuggling, etc
2	FINLAND	Finnish National Agency for Education	National Defence University Traficom	NDU is charged with quality of organizing of higher education, Traficom is charged with quality of training in seafaring area (STCW)

3	GERMANY		"Bundesamt für Seesschiffahrt und Hydrographie" (BSH)	It is in charge of some fields of training (GMDSS; ROC etc.) - quality assurance
4	GREECE		National quality assurance service	Responsible for the quality assurance in education general
5	ITALY	Italian Coastguard HQ (General Command)	In some fields, such as maritime traffic monitoring and VTS, the National Competent Authority, even for training, is the Coastguard Headquarters as operative body of the Ministry of Infrastructure and transportation	Coastguard HQ has the following functions: - set and review of training standard - control of Training Centres' activities - provide VTS rules and guideline - collect information related to the incidents/accidents occurred in a VTS area - legislative consultant on VTS
6	POLAND	Partly the Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Waterways, partly no supervising body	Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation	
7	PORTUGAL	Navy supports National Maritime Authority in training and education. Naval Academy quality assurance organization and procedures Maritime Authority School	A3AS	National Maritime Authority uses its different human resources to support education and training in specific technical areas, such as aids to navigation, pollution response, fisheries control, search and rescue, port security, legal, lifeguard techniques, etc..
8	ROMANIA			

9	SLOVENIA	Slovenian Maritime Administration		
10	SPAIN	Guardia Civil (dpt in charge of quality assurance)		A Lieutenant General of the Civil Guard is responsible, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Director General, for the direction and coordination of the development of the personnel and educational policy of the Civil Guard. It has a Technical Secretariat with the mission of assisting the holder in the performance of his duties.

In addition, in most cases (11) the organization in charge of CGF implements an internal act/regulation, including manuals or rules of procedures that define the architecture, roles and responsibilities of the quality assurance in training provision. The content of such acts is described below:

- The Quality Handbook of the Border and Coast Guard Academy covers all the trainings organized by the Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy, how trainings are planned, designed, executed, assessed, how feedback is collected and handled. In addition to this, there is an Annual Plan of Actions for Finnish Border and Coast Guard Academy which defines all actions and functions carried out in the academy and the ordinance which defines roles and responsibilities of personnel.
- For VTS, National Directive VTS007 that includes all provisions coming from IALA documents related to the training and accreditation process.
- Not all the courses have approved manuals. Only in some areas such as life-guard (its mandatory by law).
- Naval academy quality assurance organisation and procedures.
- This internal regulation usually provides education and training during working hours and involves theoretical parts and repetition of laws and acts which are important to the workplace.

In some cases, reference is made to the SQF developed by Frontex.

With regard to the internal organization, in 9 out of 15 cases there is a specific unit/department in charge of quality assurance and it is generally included in the same Directorate/Department in charge of training planning and provision. However, the relationship between the unit in charge of training and quality assurance is not hierarchical as the latter may refer to external authorities, or regulations.

The quality assurance authorities for CGF are public in 100% of the cases.

In 50% of the cases, reference is made to quality assurance standards as follows:

- ISO 9001:2015
- SQF FRONTEX,
- ESQF
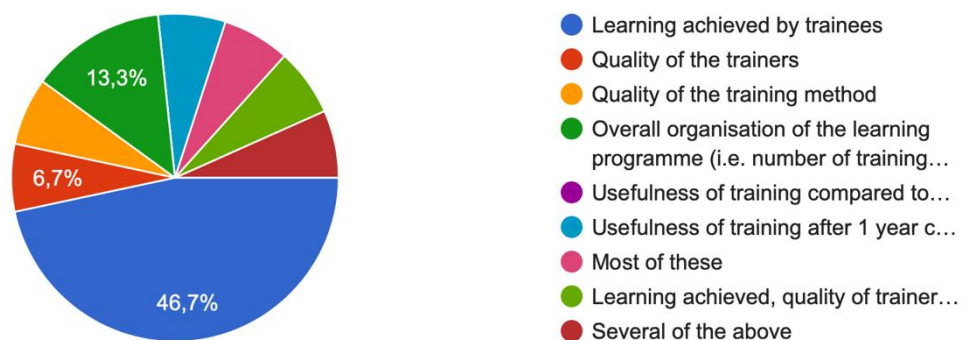- For part of services like PSC, Flag State, seafarers, VTS
- ISO
- IALA

e) Quality assurance tools used by each institution and at national/sectoral level (part IV)

The majority (80%) of respondents stated that the organisation adopted tools (e.g. internal guidelines, written procedures and internal handbooks for its employees) to ensure the quality of training.

The most common tools used are the following:

- Guidelines
- Internal procedures
- Manuals
- Self-assessment based on check list
- Check list (by an evaluator)
- External evaluation
- Peer review
- Minimum criteria

The following dimensions are the main subject of evaluations:

- Learning achieved by trainees
- Quality of the trainers
- Quality of the training method
- Overall organisation of the learning programme (i.e. number of training…
- Usefulness of training compared to…
- Usefulness of training after 1 year c…
- Most of these
- Learning achieved, quality of trainer…
- Several of the above

However, in 50% of the cases, the evaluation varies on the type of qualification released/training provided.

## f) Transparency, publicity and revision of QA adopted at national level (part V)

In terms of the transparency and publicity of the quality assurance mechanisms, there is in general little or any information made available for the public in general, or even the trainees.

Indeed, only 4 respondents state that there is a pre-defined procedure for the revision of quality assurance mechanism in terms of fixed period, fixed tool, or similar.

In the majority of cases, there is not even an official database/website with learning opportunities and training programmes.

Is there an official database/website with learning opportunities /training programmes?

(findings on 12 answers)
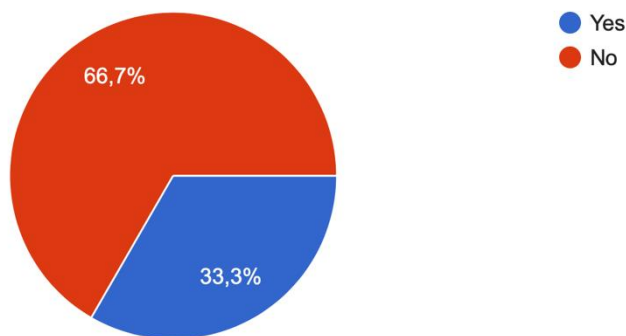
The frequency of the revision QA is variable: it goes from revision after each course, to revision every 5 years. However, the answers might be based on a mis-perception of the question as it is not realistic to revise the entire quality assurance mechanism after each course or year. Answers referring to shorter period might likely refer to the revision of the organization a specific course/training programme.
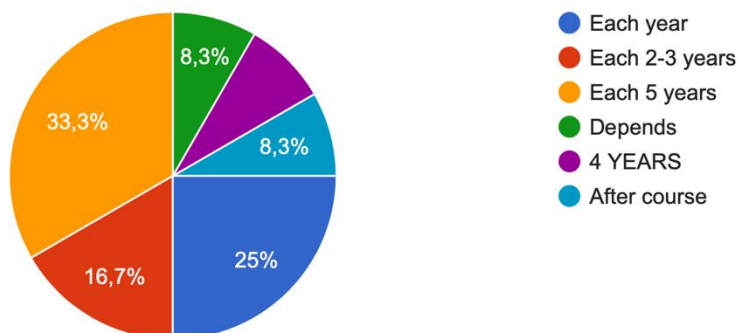
An example of the comments received on this issue is provided below:

- Official self-evaluation and external evaluation are organized every five years,

guidelines and development plan are updated annually on the bases of an evaluation made by the academy's training development group.

- The revision is made annually through internal and external audits. Internal audits cover all the quality procedures and documentation and it's carried out by qualified personnel. The external audits are made in conjunction with the National Competent Authority every 2/3 years.

As regard the persons involved in the evaluation of training, in most of the cases both trainees and trainers are involved, but in the majority of cases only for the specific programme they received/delivered and not for the training programmes in general. They generally contribute by means of surveys/questionnaires, which in most cases are anonymous.

In addition to the learners and trainers, the following people are also involved in training evaluation:

- Management involved in training, training developers and others
- Educational Department
- Support personnel
- General Staff and Teaching Headquarters
- Similar institutions and higher educational institutions
- Human Resources and logistics dept.

Conclusions

Based on the answers received to the questionnaire, the following general conclusions can be drawn:

- The national education and training system in the field of Coast Guard Functions is not organized in the same way in all the respondent countries;
- All the respondents are well aware of the existence of a NQF/SQF in their country, but only in few cases there is a specific a SQF for Coast Guard Functions linked to the NQF;
- In the majority of cases qualifications in CGF are assessed against learning outcomes, while the use of a credit systems, including the ECTS, is still not used as standard. A certain concern on comparability exists, but it is mainly for internal comparison and based on statistical information (hours of training).
- With regard to the overall regulation of the quality assurance mechanism, the situation is even less homogeneous: while in general terms there is national and internal regulation, the roles, functions and mechanisms for quality assurance vary a lot from organization to organization and from country to country.
- Significant attention is paid to the quality assurance of specific training programmes. Evaluation is made regularly and involves many stakeholders. However, reviews are not published and/or made available for accountability, transparency or international comparability purposes.

In summary, in view of the adoption of the SQFCGF, there is a sufficient relevant "culture" on quality assurance and evaluation. At the same time, quality assurance could be performed in a more consistent manner among different organisations and countries and should also be conducted utilising a more international (European).