

# Comparing Quality Management



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# Comparing Quality Management Systems and procedures in Italy and Germany

## Introduction

Talking about quality in the adult learning sector provokes a discussion about various issues: What is quality? Why is a discussion about quality in the adult learning sector necessary? How would a European perspective on the topic look like in order to compare the implementation of quality in different countries? Therefore, this article defines key terms by taking a comparative perspective and illustrating several similarities and differences of instruments and procedures of quality management systems (QMS) in Italy and Germany. This paper is based on the discussions during the 2015 Winter School on lifelong learning at the University of Würzburg, Germany.

Quality has been part of many debates in the adult learning sector in Germany for over 40 years (cf. Faulstich & Zeuner, 2010, p. 109). The stakeholders of the adult learning sector in Germany and internationally try to meet requirements between two identified approaches: On the one hand, the aim is to reach higher efficiency and effectiveness through high levels of achievement in learning outcomes at reasonable costs. On the other hand, there is a humanist approach concerning the development of the learner and social change (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2013, p. 30). The focus of the humanist approach is on the learning process and consumer protection. Critics of the quality discussion held in recent years point out that education in particular is not comparable to a service and needs the motivation and activity of the learner (cf. Poschalko, 2011, p. 28).

To determine categories of the term quality, the international study group created the following working definition of quality: In order to improve teaching and learning, institutions of the adult learning sector develop instruments to measure and analyse the efficiency and effectiveness of their educational processes. It has to be mentioned that quality processes take place at different levels of adult learning (cf. Faulstich & Zeuner, 2010, p. 113).

Many providers of adult learning in the European Union are required to show the implementation of several standards at different levels of their institution (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2013). However, the ways in which these standards are implemented vary widely, and the type and intensity of quality systems range from

the concrete implementation of certificates which include planning, financing, learning, teaching, and evaluating to limited quality systems on the macro level (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2013, p. 21). In general, quality management systems measure the long-term inputs and outcomes of an institution. As a result, targeted developments oriented towards pre-defined quality criteria of an adult learning provider become possible (cf. Faulstich & Zeuner, 2010, p. 111).

This article refers to the circle of quality in the organisation. Section 2 points out different instruments and procedures according to various institutions and framework conditions in Italy and Germany. Discussing different sectors of adult learning—for instance vocational education, higher education<sup>1</sup>, and general education—the article demonstrates that quality management systems not only depend on the specific orientation and size of the institution but also to a large degree on the structural requirements of its own policy background, legislation, and economy. Furthermore, the conclusion will show similarities and differences of implementing quality management systems in the two European countries.

## Quality Management System Procedures in Italy

The implementation of the quality management system of adult learning in Italy is quite challenging to analyse, as the various sectors of adult education are managed at different institutional levels. The attention will be focused on quality management systems (QMS) and quality assurance systems (QAS) in higher education and in vocational and educational training.

It was only in the past decade that Italy started to improve ‘quality’ in the sense given to this word by the European Recommendation. Before that, quality was conceived more as a means of control than an improvement measure, but lately many efforts have been made to align Italy’s quality systems with European standards.

### Vocational education and training (VET)

The main actors in Italy’s vocational education and training system are the regions, together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the social partners. The latter also play an important role, having been recognised as partners of

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1 Adult learning commonly ‘includes all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training’ (Research voor Beleid, 2013, p. 10). In Italy, higher education is a part of adult learning, whereas in Germany, higher education is excluded caused by different divisions of legal jurisdiction and political responsibility.

the regions for the planning of training and as potential providers of training schemes. Thus, the responsibility is shared between the national level, where the institutional framework is defined, the regional level, where a direct intervention in the process of defining, planning, and providing vocational education and training strategies is implemented, and the enterprise level, where training plans are elaborated and put into action.

For vocational education and training, the most important recent development is the *National Plan for Quality Assurance (Piano nazionale per la garanzia di qualità dei sistemi di istruzione e formazione professionale)*, introduced in March 2012 with the aim to introduce, in line with the European Recommendation, useful elements for the empowerment and qualitative development of vocational education and training systems (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2013, p. 255).

The National Plan introduces an accreditation system for all education providers, requiring them to meet minimal standards *ex ante*, living up to these standards during the accreditation period, and achieving and measuring results *ex post*. Moreover, ISO certificates are used to rationalise processes.

According to the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) recommendation, the ten indicators to support evaluation and quality improvement are:

- relevance of quality assurance systems for vocational education and training providers
- investment in the training of teachers and trainers;
- participation rate in VET programmes;
- completion rate in VET programmes;
- placement rate in VET programmes;
- utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace;
- unemployment rate;
- presence of vulnerable groups;
- mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market;
- schemes used to promote better access to vocational education and training.

These indicators are part of the Reference Framework, a voluntary instrument that can be implemented progressively and in accordance with national legislation and practices. They are not to be regarded as benchmarks but rather as support for culture in vocational education and training.<sup>2</sup>

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2 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-quality-assurance-reference-framework/framework-overview>.

The public agency in charge of monitoring the quality of the vocational education and training system is *ISFOL* (*Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori*), which works under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. ISFOL's main goals are to update the main national stakeholders about the initiatives of the EQAVET, to contribute with active support to the development of this programme, to bring methods into play to guarantee and develop quality in vocational education and training, and to coordinate activities on a national level.<sup>3</sup>

### Higher education

Regarding higher education, quality management systems can be implemented in different fields, such as teaching, researching, and administrative support, and there is not always a connection between those systems. As a consequence, many different stakeholders are involved in the implementation of quality management systems, including students, families, enterprises, economic agents, society, professional orders, professors, and researchers.

Higher education is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, University, and Research, but universities are given a high level of autonomy. The national agency in charge of controlling and implementing quality is *ANVUR* (*Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca*).

Since 2013, the quality assurance of higher education has been monitored by the AVA system (Self-Assessment, Evaluation, Accreditation). The first requirement of this system is based on the development of internal self-evaluation activities to check the quality and efficacy of teaching and research. The second requirement implies a periodic external evaluation of the efficacy and efficiency of teaching and research. The third requirement is to provide periodic accreditation for location and courses. In the elaboration and development of this system, ANVUR respected the three principles of autonomy, responsibility, and evaluation (cf. Turri, 2014, p. 43). The strength of this system is mainly in the selection of external evaluators and in students' involvement in the evaluation process. The central role of universities in the evaluation process and the focus on quantitative requirements are elements of weakness. The process is not sufficiently focused on the quality of competences and teaching. An element of further concern regarding the quality of competences can be seen in the experimental TECO test, developed by ANVUR in 2013. This test aims to test students' general competences (problem solving, critical thinking, ability to communicate) during the final year of their

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3 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/italy>.

cycle of studies, to satisfy the interests of stakeholders (the business community, above all) concerned about the improvement of university learning outcomes. An important role is also given to ISO certificates, which provide a more homogeneous and standardized means of quality control in all the higher education sectors, including teaching, research, and administrative services.

To conclude, it is important to mention that the non-formal sector of adult education lacks a legal framework and a national quality assurance and management system. To address this lack, some institutions have developed their own quality system with the aim of gaining external accreditation. One of the main examples is *UPTER (Università popolare della terza età di Roma)*, the People's University of Rome, which has developed a quality charter of its own to control the quality of the institution's general organisation and to increase the transparency of the quality assurance and development system. It is divided into four sections, looking at quality at the strategic, organisational, operational, and customer protection level. The core section is the operational level, in which staff competences are described and quality indicators and standards are elaborated (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2013, p. 87).

## Quality Management System Procedures in Germany

Quality has been an issue for continuing learning in Germany since the 1990s (cf. Tödt, 2008, p. 86). There are various reasons, including limited resources and the aim to optimise workflows and working conditions (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 21). A buyer's market has emerged in the continuing learning sector, which means that customers have to select from a wide range of offerings (cf. Zech, 2006, pp. 21–22). Certainly, customers are increasingly aware of quality (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 22). In Germany, there are many different models concerning quality in the adult education sector (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, p. 63). Below, we will introduce two different examples of quality management system procedures used in liberal adult education and vocational continuing education. The first example is the LQW model, which has an educational focus; the second refers to the ISO series, which is broader in its applications.

### The quality management system procedure in liberal adult education

LQW stands for *Lernerorientierte Qualitätstestierung in der Weiterbildung*, or learner-oriented quality certification for continuing education organisations. Its basic assumption is that education is not a product to be bought and sold (cf. Dal-luege & Franz, 2008, p. 46). Because of the special character of this education sector,

a particular quality management system is needed (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 89). LQW is the most widely used instrument in the field of public continuing education, especially at Germany's adult learning centres (*Volkshochschulen*) (cf. Dalluege & Franz, 2008, p. 11). The *Volkshochschule* is a public continuing education provider offering a wide range of courses (e.g. language and culture courses or courses on political or health-related topics, etc.) (cf. Süßmuth & Sprink, 2011, p. 479). They offer courses that are, as a general rule, accessible to the entire population (cf. Süßmuth & Sprink, 2011, p. 473). *Volkshochschulen* are financed through course fees, public grants, and external funds (cf. DVV, n.d.).

The goal of LQW is not only quality assurance but also quality development and it focuses on the learners (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 89). The model works with a definition of 'successful learning' (*gelungenes Lernen*) that looks at ideal outcomes of learning (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 37).

LQW quality development and attestation has eleven quality areas, including a mission statement, teaching and learning processes, controlling, and evaluation (cf. Dalluege & Franz, 2008, pp. 46–47). Organisations have to prove that they fulfil these criteria by composing a self-report to be confirmed by means of external reviews (cf. Dalluege & Franz, 2008, p. 47). In other words, LQW is a combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation (cf. Tödt 2008, p. 109). In the end, there is always a final workshop for the elaboration of development goals for which the organisation itself is responsible (cf. Zech, 2006, pp. 109–110).

According to Hartz and Meisel (2006), LQW has certain positive aspects. For example, it helps to point out an 'individual reference point' and allows for comparing organisations. To that end, the link between self-evaluation and external evaluation is useful. However, the authors criticise that organisational and pedagogical quality aspects are not more clearly separated (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, pp. 81–82).

### **The quality system procedure in vocational continuing education**

Initially, the DIN EN ISO series (9000, 9001, 9002, 9003, 9004) was not developed for the education sector but for industry, as Hartz and Meisel (2006) point out. After its revision in 2000, it also worked for companies in the service sector. A company called CERTQUA managed it to make it applicable to the vocational education sector (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, pp. 66–67).

In Germany, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) is an example of a company that offers vocational education and uses the DIN ISO series. Generally, the IHK is a representation of business interests and has five large task areas (economic and legal policy statements, expert opinions, support for vocational

training, and administrative tasks) (cf. DIHK, 2004, pp. 6ff.) It is financed through fees and compulsory contributions from the companies that are members in these chambers (cf. DIHK, 2004, p. 12).

Hartz and Meisel (2006) point out that the revised DIN EN ISO operates on the basis of a closed loop that has five elements (e.g. responsibility of the leadership, resource management, etc.). The instrument monitors the entire process, not only the results (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, pp. 66–67).

Another aspect is DIN EN ISO certification. According to Bülow-Schramm (2006), an organisation handbook with information about procedures is needed. This book and a mission statement can function as a starting point for certification. Subsequently, the certification body checks if the details correspond to the chosen norm. After a positive review, preparations are made for a certification audit. This audit contains questions based on a checklist and a multi-day inspection in the organisation. Then, there is an assessment of the results, which are summarised in a report. Additionally, there is a discussion with the company management about these results. The certificate is valid for three years and contains the documentation of the inspection (cf. Bülow-Schramm, 2006, pp. 41–42).

According to Hartz and Meisel (2006), one disadvantage of the ISO norm is the exclusion of pedagogical parts. The model ignores special features of teaching and learning processes and the fact that learning processes are barely controllable. More important for the norm is the organisation and the processes through which teaching and learning processes are arranged, even though the criteria for them are imprecise (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, p. 70).

In the meantime, another DIN ISO norm, the DIN ISO 29990, has been introduced. According to Rau et al. (2011), the focus is on the learning process. The norm is for anyone who wants to achieve successful results in learning. It has a special focus on the learning processes. Quality is controlled by internal audits and monitoring of learning, learning services, and the competences of this service (cf. Rau et al., 2011, p. 1). Learning services include the determination of needs, the design of learning services, their delivery, and an evaluation of learning and learning services (cf. Rau et al., 2011, p. 9).

## Conclusion

Both in Italy and in Germany, quality management systems are implemented as a top down process in adult learning institutions. The responsible authorities are mostly the national government, but also increasingly the European Union, which expects high-level performances to support the goals of lifelong learning, as defined in the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (European Commission,

2000). For historical reasons, Germany has a wide range of national organisations of quality management in the adult education sector. After reunification in the 1990s, there was a lack of suitable providers with adequate quality services. However, government funding was not used effectively. As a consequence, adult education providers had to obtain seals of quality from independent companies. That is one of the reasons why many quality instruments exist at the local level, like the TÜV seal or the Hamburg model (cf. Everett & Müller in this book). In Italy, the influence of the European Union is stronger. The attention to adult education started after the First World War, and its main goal was to fight illiteracy, which was widespread throughout the country, especially in the southern regions. Adult education has always been characterised by a territorial approach, meaning that there are variations in adult education provision from region to region and locality to locality. In more recent years, mainstream adult education has been developed within the context of lifelong learning as presented by the EU, and very much dependant on ESF funding made available through regions, provinces, and municipalities (cf. Research voor Beleid, 2011, p. 5).

Concerning the two approaches to quality, the adult learning sector has to fulfil economic requirements in particular. In Germany, as well as in Italy, adult learning providers act according to efficiency and effectiveness. ISO certificates in particular, used in both countries, emphasise a productive organisation including measurable learning outcomes. The humanistic approach seems rather less pronounced. However, in Germany, the LQW instrument pays attention to the learning process, whereas in Italy students, teachers, and other stakeholders are included in the quality management process of higher education. Nevertheless, the interests of the learner often do not figure prominently in the quality thinking of adult learning institutions. Learners want good quality for an acceptable price. However, on the one hand, quality is characterised by objective features and hence measurable and comparable. On the other hand, learners' subjective evaluation shows a new necessary perspective on quality. This perspective expresses the particular feature of the learning process and the role of the learner (cf. Poschalko, 2011, p. 28). Even though the learning process involves effort and inconveniences, the quality of the course may be good. It is important to note that quality also includes an efficient transfer into practice after the course and sustainability of the learning process.

Another stakeholder in the quality discussion is the adult educator. The perspective of the educator should take the learner's perspective of quality into account. Moreover, it is a question of professionalism and skills. Apart from formal qualifications, informally acquired skills and a network in adult education are

more and more desirable (cf. Poschalko, 2011, p. 27). In contrast to the teacher perspective, the organisational viewpoint is less pedagogically oriented. Providers are required to implement a quality assurance system in order to establish more transparency, higher comparability, and clarity (cf. Hartz & Meisel, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, they have to invest time and money to achieve higher economic standards. Nevertheless, a discrepancy exists between slashing funding and making higher demands on providers.

These perspectives show the different point of views on quality management systems. Nevertheless, it is now broadly understood that a quality management system is important to create transparency, comparable certificates, and well-working organisations in the adult learning sector. But it is important not to forget the learning process with its unpredictable educational effects. Further research could explore how a more humanistic approach can be implemented in the adult learning sector and among its relevant national and international stakeholder

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Peggy Everett & Christian Müller

# **Comparative analysis of two quality management models in the U.S.A. and Germany**

## **Abstract**

The article compares two quality management models widely used in the US and Germany. First, it provides a short insight into the practice of quality management in the US and Germany by giving a short description and classifying the quality management models into their respective systems. Furthermore, the article analyses four specific aspects for a deeper insight into the development, procedures, institutions, and costs of both models. It will become evident that despite some differences, many similarities exist, especially regarding the processes of the two quality management models.

## **Introduction**

Quality management models in adult education are developed against the background of specific and unspecific needs, which are influenced and given by politics, social movements and reforms, economic conditions, mission statements, contracts and orders, as well as other factors. Such needs are located in a tension field of control, media, money, and power (cf. Aust & Schmidt-Hertha, 2012, p. 46) and are manifested in optimisation and improvement, legitimisation, client demands, and organisational requirements. It is the aim of this article to compare two well-known quality management models in the United States (regional accreditation) and Germany (learner-oriented quality certification) and to identify similarities and differences in the categories of development, procedures, institutions, and costs. For the most part, this text shouldn't just provide a description but highlight the opportunities resulting from learning from one another.

## **Regional accreditation (US) and learner-oriented quality certification (Germany)**

### **Regional accreditation in the United States**

Because the tenth amendment of the US constitution guarantees states' rights to education, no overarching seal of quality is used in postsecondary education in the US. Instead, a system of regionally-based accreditation, and to a lesser extent

nationally-based accreditation, guarantees quality in adult education settings. Any programme in adult education may apply for accreditation and/or become accredited by the regional or national accreditation agencies. These range from adult basic education (ABE) to vocational training (VET), both public and private, to institutions of higher education, both public and private. According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, accreditation is 'a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinise colleges, universities, and educational programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement' (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012, p. 1). Private, non-profit organisations specifically designed for accreditation ensure the quality management process. Postsecondary institutions and programmes apply for accreditation to demonstrate academic quality and to be eligible for federal funds. These institutions can be either non-profit or for-profit; currently, about half of the accredited organisations are not-for profit (cf. Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012, p. 1). There are four institutional accreditations used in the US:

- regional, which are degree-granting institutions
- national faith-related, mostly non-profit, degree-granting institutions
- national career-related, mostly non-degree granting and both for-profit and non-profit private and public institutions
- programmatic, which serve single-purpose institutions like law and medical schools and review programmes (cf. Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012, p. 2).

The accreditation procedure is conducted in a cycle ranging, at most, every ten years.

### **US accreditation cycle**

Institutions and programmes aren't the only ones under review in the US; accrediting organisations must receive recognition in order to grant accreditation to institutions and programmes. They receive recognition from either the US Department of Education or from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, which have very different standards for granting recognition (cf. US Department of Education, 2015).

### **LQW – Learner-Oriented Quality Certification for Further Education Organisations**

The implementation of quality management models in organisations of adult education in Germany has been critically reviewed since its beginnings, because

organisational and economic interests seem to be in conflict with pedagogical requirements. Subsequently, to adopt business-like quality management models, it was necessary that the adult education community develop models that ‘... overcome the dominance of the organisation and move the core of pedagogical activities to the fore ...’ (Hartz, 2011, p. 35). Therefore, the concept of quality in adult education refers to the learning outcomes (quality of results) as well as to the learning process (quality of process) (cf. Aust & Schmidt-Hertha, 2012, p. 45).

Among other models, the Learner-Oriented Quality Certification for Further Education Organisations (LQW) has been developed by the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning (*Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung*) to meet the abovementioned challenges. The LQW is an instrument for quality testing *and* quality development. The central idea of an education-focused quality management is to realise that education isn’t manageable in the same way as typical services or products are. Education, in particular, cannot be produced by the organisation alone; rather, it is the task of the organisation to care about the conditions for successful learning (cf. Zech, 2008, p. 12). Therefore, LQW defines the following eleven sectors of quality:

- “1. *Mission Statement and Definition of Successful Learning*
2. *Needs Analysis*
3. *Key Processes*
4. *Teacher-Learner Process*
5. *Evaluation of the Educational Process*
6. *Infrastructure*
7. *Management*
8. *Human Ressources*
9. *Controlling*
10. *Costumer Relations*
11. *Strategic Development Goals*” (Zech, 2007, p. 13)

All sectors of quality must be documented in a self-evaluation report, which will be verified afterwards by an audit visit. At a final workshop, the strategic development goals are determined and the passed quality procedure will be reflected (cf. Zech, 2008, p. 14).

## Development

### Development of accreditation in the US

After Harvard was established in 1636, many universities, both public and private, emerged all over the US. Normal schools, schools offering standard teacher

training, and schools offering higher education emerged in the 1880s. The state of education (and miseducation) evolved, and many associations and committees dedicated to the regulation of quality in education were founded. By the 1940s, both theorists and practitioners of postsecondary education knew something had to be done. Troops were returning home with the new GI Bill, which granted money for postsecondary education to soldiers. The National Commission on Accreditation was established to relieve the burden and to assure that federal dollars earmarked for the education of veterans were well spent. Because the Bill of Rights guarantees states' rights over education, the federal government could not enforce any act of quality. This resulted in the regional accreditation system seen today, which presides over public education and national accreditation for religious, specialised, and career-oriented institutions (cf. Brittingham, 2009).

### Development of LQW in Germany

Although quality played a role in the adult education discourse early on, the beginning of the (education-policy) discourse about quality in further education in Germany could be dated around the year 1976, when the Distance Learning Protection Act (*Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz FernUSG*) was adopted. This act survived nearly unchanged over the years (despite continued discussion about quality); it could therefore be termed a fossil of the quality discussion (cf. Gnahs, 2005, p. 10). However, it marks the beginning of a discourse about quality aspects in adult education. After the implementation of state laws on further training (*Weiterbildungsgesetze der Länder*) during the 1960s and 1970s, the discussion about quality and quality management systems became more intensive, especially during the 1990s (cf. Hartz, 2011, p. 24), responding, on the one hand, to those laws, new market conditions, customer requirements, cost pressures, and so on. On the other hand, quality management became emancipated from procedures too closely aligned to business practices with the help of quality management models like the LQW. Furthermore, vocational education and training programmes that seek funding from the Federal Labour Office have to prove quality certification. This processes is regulated by the Accreditation and Certification Ordinance—Employment Promotion (*Akkreditierungs- und Zulassungsverordnung – Arbeitsförderung AZAV*) (until 04/2012: Approval and Certification Ordinance—Continuing Education, *Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung – Weiterbildung AZWV*). The AZWV focused first on the level of the organisation/operators and second on the level of the educational measure (cf. Hartz, 2011, p. 25); the AZAV follows that approach. The testing involved

in the LQW quality procedure, which is treated in the present article, doesn't automatically lead to recognition by the Federal Labour Office (according to the AZAV), but if an organisation is tested through LQW, the AZAV accreditation is normally less cost intensive and less extensive.

The LQW was developed over a period of five years (2000–2005) in the context of numerous projects and was financed by the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*), and the European Social Fund (*Europäischer Sozialfonds*) (cf. Zech, 2008, p. 6). The first reflections followed on a collaborative project (1999–2000) between ArtSet (the LQW developer and operator) and the regional association of adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*) in Lower Saxony. In the first instance, the quality development measures were designed individually for each organisation, but it quickly became evident that there were similarities concerning the processes of quality development. In a subsequent project with the same partners, a model of quality testing was developed until 2002. In cooperation with the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) a testing phase of the testing model took place on the basis of relevant quality procedures, which were used in Germany and Europe until 2003, and two years later the implementation phase of the first LQW version followed (cf. Zech, 2006, p. 9).

## Procedures

### Procedures of US accreditation

Analysing organisations granting accreditation reinforces the American notion of checks and balances. Table 3 shows the process of accreditation utilising self-studies on the part of the institution or programme, volunteer peer reviewers, and the accrediting organisations.

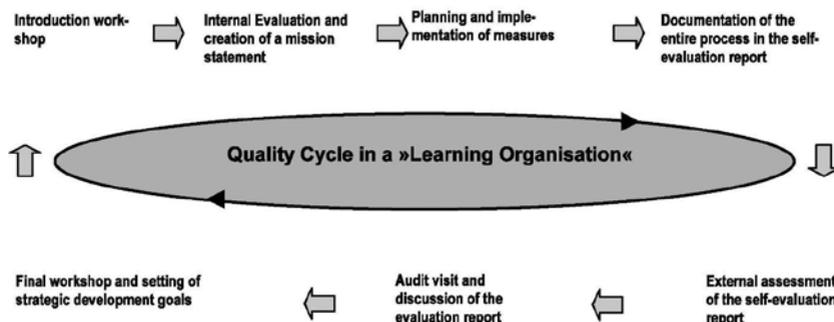
Figure 1: Author's own based on Eaton, 2012, pp. 4–5.



## Procedures of LQW in Germany

The LQW is designed as a quality circle, which consists of a period of quality development and a period of quality testing. After the opening workshop, the period of quality development begins with an internal evaluation and the preparation of a specific mission statement. Hereafter, measures will be planned and implemented. For this period, the ArtSet GmbH (the LQW developer and operator) provides working aids, a telephone hotline, email correspondence, and other opportunities to network with LQW organisations. Additionally, there are local support units and nationwide network conferences or support in terms of workshops (cf. Zech, 2008, p. 15). The whole process is documented and summarised in the self-evaluation report. At this time, the period of quality development is being replaced by the period of quality testing. The basis of the following external assessment procedure is the self-evaluation report. Furthermore, an audit visit and the discussion of the expert report of the LQW consultants take place. The quality circle ends with a final workshop and the definition of strategic development goals for upcoming quality circles (cf. Zech, 2008, p. 14).

Figure 2: The Quality Cycle (Zech, 2007, p. 14).



Altogether, the whole certification procedure extends over a period of up to 16 months: The organisation to be certified is allowed a maximum of 13 months to prepare the self-evaluation report. The subsequent assessment (two 25–30-page expert reports using their own quality assurance) takes up to 4 months. The audit visit takes place within the following 6 weeks after the receipt of the experts' report, and one week later the expert submits the minutes of the audit visit. The date of the final workshop will be agreed between the organisations and the expert, and the certificate is valid for four years (cf. Zech, 2008, pp. 18–19).

## Institutions

### Institutions and programmes accredited in the US

It is most common for institutions offering postsecondary education to apply for or continue accreditation. This provides legitimacy and public respect, federal financial aid for students, and the ability to apply for federal monies like grants. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation keeps a database of institutions and programmes accredited by the six regional accrediting organisations. They list more than 8,300 degree- and non-degree-granting institutions and almost 24,000 programmes. The database is easily accessed and searchable by institution name, country, US state/territory, and/or institutional accreditor (cf. Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012).

### Institutions and programmes accredited by LQW in Germany

According to the 2010 *Weiterbildungsmonitor* (an annual survey of continuing training providers in Germany), about 80 per cent of all training providers have

quality certificates, quality assurance models, or a quality management model in place (cf. Ambos et al., 2010, p. 4).

In Germany, 415 organisations from all 16 states are involved in the LQW processes. That means they are currently in the phase of testing, or they are certified for a maximum period of four years. The share of organisations that used the LQW as a quality model in 2010 was 10 per cent (cf. *wbmonitor*, 2010, p. 3). The participating organisations represent different areas of adult education, including vocational education and training, educational counselling, health education, adult education centres, language schools, and the like.

## Costs

### Costs of accreditation in the US

Accreditation is mostly done by volunteers. This makes it very cost effective. Brittingham reports that in 2005, 3,000 institutions were regionally accredited using 3,500 volunteers and 129 staff members (cf. Brittingham, 2009, p. 18). Dues and fees are charged by the accrediting organisation to the programme or institution on a sliding scale determined by the institutional budget. For the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE), the oldest accreditor, dues range from approximately US\$ 6,000 to US\$ 30,000. Fees vary from approximately US\$ 2,000 to US\$ 30,000 plus visiting team member expenses (cf. CIHE Dues and Fees, 2015). This can be expensive, especially for emerging programmes or new schools, and contributes to the escalating cost of postsecondary education.

### Costs of LQW in Germany

The cost of the total quality certification process are set on a sliding scale based on the size of the organisation, ranging from € 3,094 (incl. VAT) for microenterprises with a maximum of two workplaces (where a maximum of three people are working) up to € 10,591 (incl. VAT) for organisations with more than 200 employees (cf. general terms of ArtSet GmbH).

## Conclusion

Both countries recognise the importance of quality assessment and management. How this is done is quite similar in that both LQW and regional accreditation utilise internal evaluations, self-assessments, external evaluations, site visits, and continued renewals. In both countries, an overarching seal of quality does not

exist. In Germany, LQW is recognised, but there are other important seals, too (Hamburger Modell, ISO, EFQM). In the United States, regional accreditation is recognised, but it is not required for all programmes and institutions providing adult education. Germany also values using regionally-based accreditation processes, which are more frequently used than LQW. Like its US counterpart, LQW is used in both for-profit and non-profit organisations.

Although they are labelled differently, the seals of quality are similar in terms of both procedures and costs. The steps involved in the quality *testing* procedures are quite similar for both countries:

Figure 3: *Quality Testing Procedures of US Regional Accreditation and LQW*  
(Author's Own).



Although the procedure seems to be similar, the steps of quality *development* in LQW (introductory workshop, planning and implementation of measures, final workshop, and strategic development goals) do not have an equivalent in regional accreditation. Moreover, there are notable differences in the German and American use of quality and accreditation. Most notably, accreditation of higher education (institutions offering BA/MA degrees) doesn't play an important role in Germany when looking at the distribution of recognitions of all organisations offering adult education that use quality management systems (cf. Weiland, 2011, p. 5). The direct opposite is true in the US: degree-granting institutions must

be accredited or the degree granted is considered worthless by US society and employers. Additionally, credits earned at an institution lacking accreditation are not transferrable to another institution of higher education. The costs associated with LQW are generally less expensive than regional accreditation in the US. This is especially true for microenterprises, and the costs associated with LQW are comparatively less intensive for large organisations. Recognition by federal offices is also different in each country. In Germany, the Federal Labour Office does not automatically recognise LQW certifications, but holding the certification makes it easier to be recognised. In America, the federal Department of Education formally recognizes programmes and schools through regional accreditation. While the LQW is mostly utilised by vocational training and adult education centres, US regional accreditation ranges from community education to higher education. Although both developed at different times and at different rates, they were both established for the same reason: to ensure the effectiveness, quality, and standards of education for adults.

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