



Summary of
results of external
assessment of the quality of
vocational education
and training programmes
implementation.
Recommendations for
improvement of programmes
and vocational education and
training quality assurance
system



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Contents

INTRODUCTION / 4

PROCESS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES
IMPLEMENTATION / 7

Authors of self-evaluation report and evaluators of quality of programme
implementation / 7

Self-evaluation reports and visits / 8

SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES
IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO STRATEGIC EVALUATION AREAS / 9

Training / learning environment / 11

Lifelong learning / 13

Access to training / 14

Modernity of training / 15

Correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy / 16

Efficiency of information and career planning / 18

SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES
IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO QUALITY CYCLE STAGES / 19

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF VET PROGRAMMES AND VET QUALITY
ASSURANCE SYSTEM / 20

ANNEX. STRATEGIC EVALUATION AREAS, STAGES OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE,
CRITERIA, INDICATORS / 22

Strategic evaluation areas: TRAINING/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT / 22

Strategic evaluation areas: LIFELONG LEARNING / 22

Strategic evaluation areas: ACCESS TO TRAINING / 23

Strategic evaluation areas: MODERNITY OF TRAINING / 23

Strategic evaluation areas: CORRESPONDENCE OF QUALIFICATION TO THE NEEDS
OF THE ECONOMY OF LITHUANIA / 24

Strategic evaluation areas: EFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION AND CAREER PLANNING / 25

Matrix of evaluation criteria according to strategic evaluation areas and stages of
quality assurance cycle / 26

This report summarises the results of the external evaluation of the quality of vocational education and training (VET) programmes implementation. The evaluation involved programmes at the following sub-fields of education: Work of secretaries and offices (346), Work organisation (347), Automotive transport means, ships and aircrafts (525), Construction and construction engineering (582), Hotels, restaurants and public catering (811), Hair care and beauty care (815) and Travel, tourism and leisure (812). The evaluation was carried out in 2014 according to the updated **Methodology for self-analysis** of VET programmes and **Methodology for evaluation of quality of programmes implementation**¹ (hereinafter referred to as the “Methodologies”).

The “*Methodology for External Evaluation of Quality for Preparation of the Summary of Self-analysis of VET Institutions and Programmes*” and “*Methodology for External Evaluation of Quality of VET Programme*” were drawn up in the period from 2005 to 2008 as part of a national project². The results of methodology testing have revealed that external evaluation of the quality of **one** VET programme is **poorly effective** in terms of resources and costs required for the evaluation. The methodologies were restructured so as to suit the evaluation of the quality of implementation of **all VET programmes of a chosen sub-field of education**.

The methodologies were renewed taking into consideration the recommendations adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on VET quality³ and the establishment of a qualifications framework⁴, the Lithuanian qualifications framework⁵, other strategic education and quality-related documents and in accordance with the following **criteria**:

- » Practical **applicability** and versatility (simplicity, comprehensibility);
- » **Explicitness** of definitions (definitions used are harmonised with the operating legal acts and other normative documents regulating VET);
- » **Effectiveness** of application (maximum results at the lowest costs);
- » **Usefulness** to the VET provider;
- » **Development** of quality **culture**⁶.

Development of quality culture is understood as the internal and daily need of a school to focus on training quality **for themselves**, not for the purpose of audit or inspection. Therefore, in developing the methodologies, the idea of control was refused and the paradigm of **assistance to the VET provider** was referred to.

1) **Quality** for the purposes of this report means relation between reality and expectations as defined by Kim Faurisch, 2003.

2) National Project No BPD2004-ESF-2.4.0-01-04/0043 “Development and Implementation of Common Quality Assurance System of Vocational Education and Training”, 2005-2008.

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 (2009/C 155/01).

4) Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01).

5) Resolution No 535 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 4 May 2010 “On the Approval of Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework”, *Official Gazette*, 2010, No 56-2761.

6) Participants of trainings for organisers of self-analysis and evaluators are of the opinion that quality culture is characterised by the following items: common requirements and targets, communication and cooperation, micro-climate and environment, information (honest provision of details, feedback, publicity), self-cognition and education and development/formation of a responsible person.

The main **principles of external evaluation of quality of VET programmes implementation** are as follows:

- » **Contextuality** – peculiarities of the mission, vision, strategy and operational conditions of the provider of VET are taken into consideration;
- » **Comprehensive approach** – interrelationship and harmony among the assessed areas are taken into consideration;
- » **Participation of stakeholders**⁷ – assessment involves the representatives of VET system stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, social partners);
- » **Conformity of internal and external quality assurance** – internal quality assurance of VET programmes implementation and external evaluation are based on common principles which do not conflict among themselves, on publicly announced criteria, as well as on qualitative and quantitative indicators;
- » **Continuity** – results of previous evaluation and plans for quality improvement are taken into consideration.

The evaluation of quality is carried out according to strategic evaluation **areas** (hereinafter referred to as the “evaluation area”) and the **matrix of stages of quality** improvement and assurance cycle (hereinafter referred to as the “quality cycle”) (see Fig. 1). One evaluation criterion with indicators characterising it is attributed to a corresponding evaluation area and to a respective stage of the quality cycle. All evaluation criteria and indicators describing them are chosen in accordance with the Lithuanian and EU targets set for education and VET. Every indicator has a quality-level descriptor according to which the evaluation is carried out. Such a matrix of evaluation allows not only the identification of problematic areas but also gives opportunity to analyse them in more detail.

The **level of quality** of the evaluation area, the quality cycle stage, the criterion and indicator **are assessed** by scoring them from 0 to 10. The evaluation starts with the indicators. Where the quality of implementation actually fully complies with the specific descriptor of quality level, the indicator is assessed at 8. Maximum points (9 and 10) are given in cases when the actual achievements are higher than required according to the descriptor of that particular quality level. Following the evaluation of all indicators, a value is attributed to the criterion which is characterised by these indicators. An evaluator determines the value of a criterion in the form of points relying on his/her competence and opinion regarding the importance of the indicators to that particular criterion (taking into consideration the context of the programme implementation). Having evaluated the criteria, values are then attributed to the evaluation areas and quality cycle stages. The attributed values are graphically illustrated in the form of an “umbrella” (see Fig. 2). Objectivity of results is ensured by coordinating the evaluations of the external evaluators team with the evaluations of VET provider self-evaluation team. It should be noted that when considering the development of the VET system and sub-fields of education, **trends**

7) **Societal stakeholders** are persons, groups of persons or organisations having interest in the quality of operation of an institution of vocational training/studies and having tools to influence it (*ETF Gloss. – Glossary of Labour Market Terms and Curriculum Development Terms, ETF, 1997*). **Social partners** are subjects of social (collective) agreement. In accordance with the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (*Official Gazette*, 2007, No 43-1627), social partners mean institutions of employers (Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, Lithuanian Business Employers’ Confederation), institutions of business self-government (*Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts, Chamber of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania*) and organisations representing the interests of employees (Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation, Lithuanian Trade Union “Solidarity” and Lithuanian Labour Federation) and other employers’ and business self-government institutions, organisations representing the interests of employees approved by the Government which in cooperation with public management institutions perform the functions stipulated in this law.

are analysed not scores. Such a system of evaluation creates appropriate pre-conditions for an update of descriptors of quality levels and for continuous assurance of quality improvement.

Strategic assessment areas	Stages of quality assurance cycle			
	Planning	Implementation	Evaluation	Review
Training / learning environment				
Lifelong learning				
Access to training				
Modernity of training				
Correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy				
Efficiency of information and career planning				

Fig. 1. Matrix of evaluation of quality of VET programmes implementation

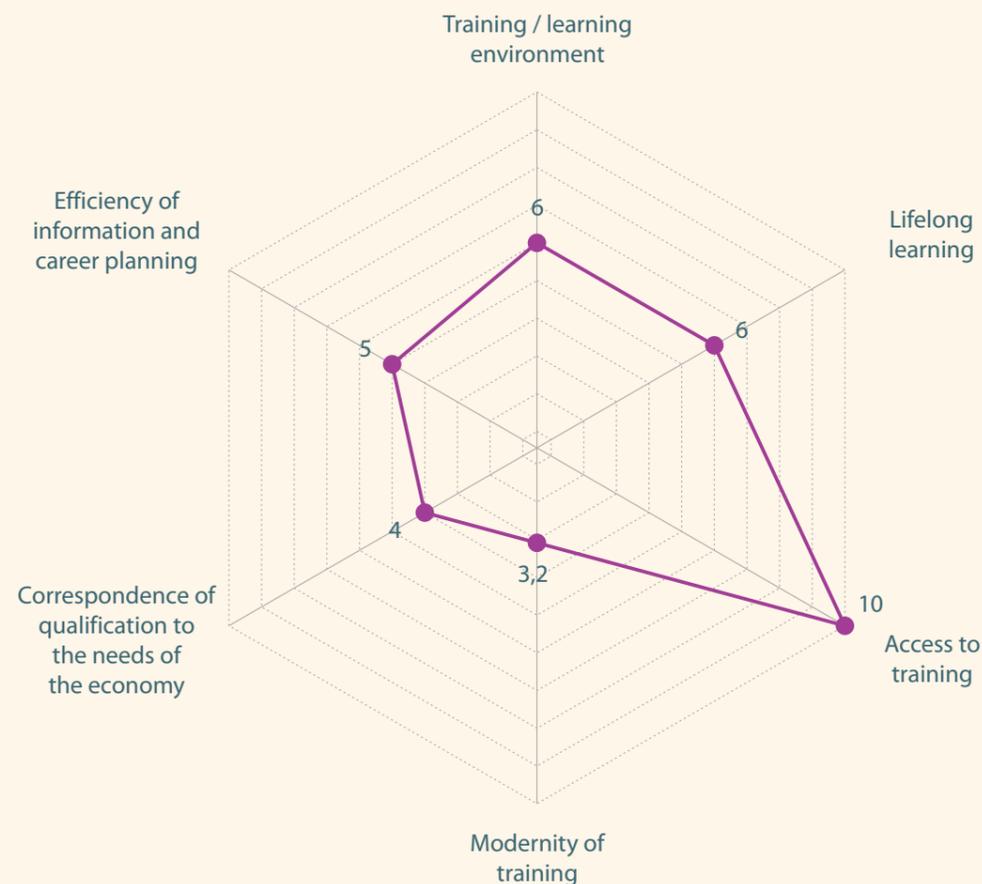


Fig. 2. "Umbrellas" of evaluation

Quality improvement is a continuous process. Therefore, methodologies should be renewed after each external evaluation. For instance, if the majority of VET providers meet a respective descriptor of quality level, this shall be corrected by raising the qualitative and/or quantitative requirements of a specific indicator.

The methodologies were updated and the evaluations of quality of VET programmes implementation were carried out as part of the national project of the *Qualifications and VET Development Centre*

"External Assessment of VET Quality" (project code No VP1-2.2-ŠMM-04-V-03-002, period of project implementation: 2013–2015). The project was funded by the European Social Fund.

PROCESS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTATION

Authors of self-evaluation report and evaluators of quality of programme implementation

The success of evaluation of quality of programme implementation largely depends on how familiar the participants of the process (authorised institution, teams of self-evaluation, evaluators) are with the methodologies. To ensure a sufficient level of knowledge and skills needed for the evaluation of quality, training courses were organised. The participants evaluated the training as good⁸. Among the major strengths of the training for self-evaluation teams the following were mentioned: lecturers, clarity of information, practical tasks. The participants of the training for evaluators named practical tasks, teamwork and lecturers as the main strengths. **In the opinion of all participants, the timing of the training should be different**, i.e. they should not be organised during school holidays. It should also be emphasised that every participant should be provided with a complete set of material needed for practical tasks (a full set of methodology, criteria and indicators).

It should be noted that **only some of the training participants** were later assigned as members of self-evaluation teams or evaluators. This might be explained by the fact that to implement projects supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) certain requirements had to be complied with. Another reason is the specificity of public procurements. The aforementioned circumstances had a negative effect on the quality of evaluation of VET programmes implementation (for example, considerable differences of the same indicator evaluation in the same school). Therefore, it is recommended that the requirements for ESF projects be reconsidered and amended correspondingly so that effective implementation of ESF projects would be guaranteed and the quality of their results ensured (i.e. public procurements should be applied in such a way that the quality of further activities could be ensured without any increase in the costs of the implementation process).

Based on the reports of the evaluation of quality of VET programmes implementation, the conclusion may be drawn that the **majority of evaluators were vocational teachers**. On the one hand, this is good because the teachers are familiar with the context and the contents of the VET programme. On the other hand, a threat to the objectiveness of assessments (for example, due to reluctance to damage relations with colleagues) and competence (for example, in assessing the compliance of VET with the needs of the market) is posed. In addition, there was a lack of "another"/"different" opinion. Based on the experience of quality assessment of higher education, a team of evaluators also involves a student. It therefore follows that it would be logical to have student/learner representatives on evaluators' teams because they are the main recipients of the VET service. For even greater objectivity in quality

⁸ The results of surveys of the participants of trainings for organisers of self-analysis and evaluators; respondents: 124 organisers of self-analysis and 92 evaluators.

assessment, it is recommended that the principles for forming evaluators' groups be corrected in the methodology, i.e. to establish a clear requirement that an evaluator group has to include an employer representative and a learner representative. If possible, it is recommended to involve colleagues from other EU Member States in an evaluators team as this could contribute to the internationalisation of Lithuanian VET.

Based on the quality evaluation reports and the seminars for the discussion of results, it can be noted that **it was quite difficult to carry out the first assessments**. The main reasons include the difference in understanding the definitions, assessment methodologies, criteria and indicators and the limited experience in carrying out evaluation. The issue of attribution of scores prompted most discussions, i.e. how to determine how important an indicator is for the evaluation of a criterion (for example in evaluation of the modernity of training in small schools which have no modern base, this is a very important indicator reflecting where the practical training is taking place). Later the process became easier. **Evaluation is accumulative know-how**, therefore, it is very important that an evaluator team contain experts with experience in carrying out evaluation of quality. The seminar participants expressed the view that it would be reasonable to **organise a meeting with experts that have carried out several evaluations** of quality. It is also recommended to **form a bank of evaluators** and keep complementing it with new members so that in carrying out evaluations there would be at least one member with sufficient experience, i.e. would have performed evaluation in accordance with the methodologies.

Self-evaluation reports and visits

The templates of self-evaluation and external evaluation reports were designed for use by applying **information technologies** (IT). Regrettably, the development of the IT tool was delayed. For this reason drafting of self-evaluation and evaluation reports, processing and analysis of results required more time than planned.

It is observed that the **quality of self-evaluation reports is different**. This may be evidenced by the summary of quality evaluation reports in specific sub-field of education (hereinafter referred to as the "sub-field reports"). The authors of the latter reports claim that the level of quality largely depended on the attitude of the management of a VET institution, which varied from high interest to indifference. In accordance with the methodology for the undertaking of self-evaluation, self-evaluation team should also have assigned scores to indicators, criteria, evaluation areas and quality cycle stages and then later discussed them with evaluators. It is therefore recommended that more time be devoted to this area during future training of self-evaluation teams.

Evaluations of quality of VET programmes implementation were **carried out during the summer**. This meant that the evaluators had no opportunity to communicate with learners, teachers, or social partners as stipulated in the methodologies. Therefore, some scores are often based on the analysis of documents only, and may not in fact correspond to the actual situation. The opinion of evaluators themselves with regard to the timing of quality evaluations was different. Some of them said that summer is a suitable time to carry out evaluation, as there is more time to analyse the self-evaluation reports. Meanwhile, others claimed that evaluations should be implemented during the teaching pro-

cess since this would allow checking certain details provided in self-evaluation reports (for instance, efficiency of occupation of workshops). A greater number of evaluators preferred the second alternative, i.e. claiming that **evaluations should be carried out during the education process**. It should be noted that the first view is more convenient to the evaluators themselves as they have a much-reduced workload during the summer.

According to the sub-field reports, the **evaluation process was smooth in the majority of VET institutions**. There were perfect conditions for work, all resources were demonstrated, and there was a good atmosphere. There were, however, some schools that had a negative attitude and a certain "pressure" could be felt. In some schools, following the explanation that evaluation is carried out with the aim to see the good practice, the attitude became more positive. This shows that in implementing evaluation of quality, it is particularly important to follow the quality philosophy as a means of assistance to the providers of VET: to properly prepare schools by familiarising them with the main targets, objectives and benefits of evaluation.

Evaluators of the quality of VET programmes implementation assessed the **usefulness of the process** as being good. The possibilities to learn about the situation in other schools, to compare it with other VET institutions providing the same programmes, to see the areas for improvement and share good practice in ensuring programme implementation quality were underlined in particular. Due to the limited volume this report provides only some of the examples of good practice according to individual areas of evaluation.

It is recommended that VET providers would be encouraged to disseminate and share the examples of good practice more intensively. It is also suggested **that the examples of good practice be systemised** after the external evaluation **and that they be accessible for all VET providers**.

SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO STRATEGIC EVALUATION AREAS

As previously mentioned, quality assessments were carried out in 7 (seven) sub-fields of education. The number of VET providers in them varies from 14 to 49. Detailed data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of VET providers by sub-field of education

Education sub-field	Number of providers	Education sub-field	Number of providers
Work of secretaries and offices (346)	20	Work organisation (347)	42
Automotive transport means, ships and aircrafts (525)	43	Construction and construction engineering (582)	43
Hotels, restaurants and public catering (811)	49	Hair care and beauty care (815)	14
Travel, tourism and leisure (812)	20		

Generalised assessment according to strategic areas is presented in Fig. 3. It reveals that indicators characterising Information and Career Planning area have received the highest evaluations, i.e. best meeting the descriptors of quality level. Areas that need most improvement are: Lifelong learning, Access to training and Modernity of training. A more detailed analysis of every evaluation area is provided below.

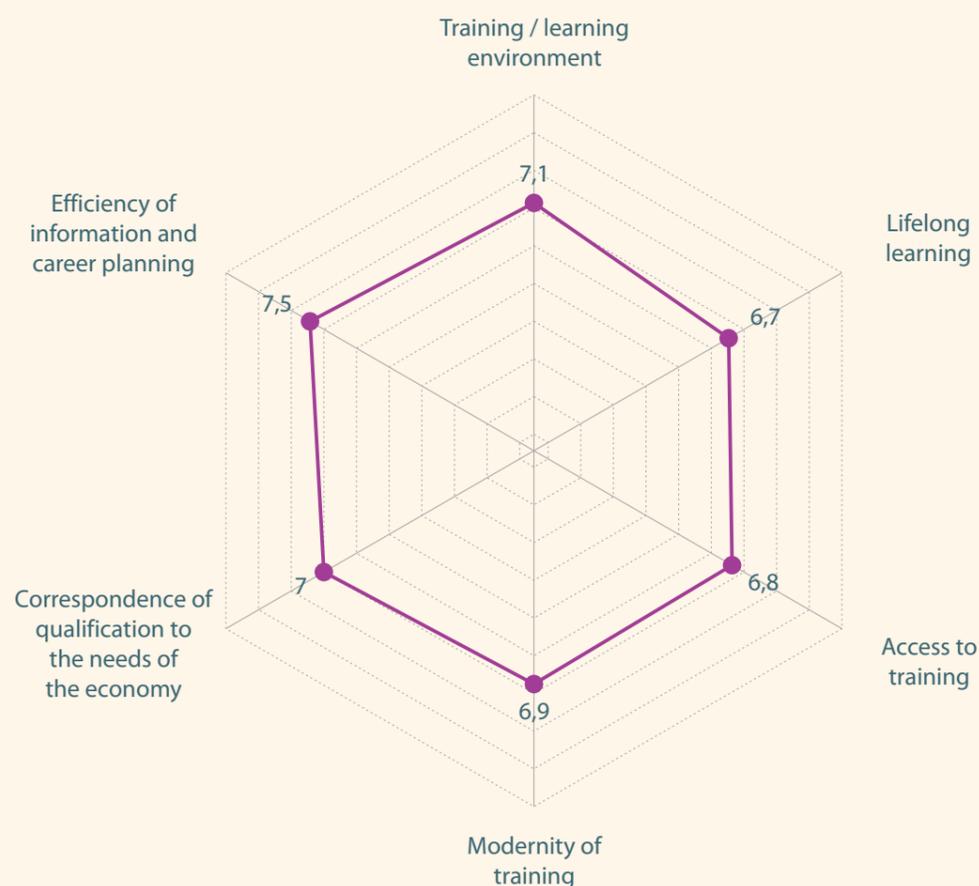


Fig. 3. Generalised results of evaluations in sub-fields of education according to strategic evaluation areas

The analysis of quality evaluations reports by sub-fields of education (see Fig. 4) reveals that all strategic evaluation areas in the sub-field Hair care and beauty services were better evaluated than in other sub-fields of education. The lowest scores in all strategic areas, except for Lifelong learning, were given to the sub-field Construction and construction engineering. Lifelong learning was worst evaluated in the sub-field Travel, tourism and leisure. **Differences between sub-fields of education** directly depend on the number and location of VET providers implementing VET programmes (i.e. where the majority of the schools providing programmes of a corresponding sub-field are operating – in towns or rural areas) and on the specificity of the sub-field (i.e. to which extent training materials are needed, the frequency of material update and its costs). Schools operating in large cities usually have a better material base for the assessed VET programmes than others. Therefore, **cooperation** between VET institutions providing programmes in the same sub-field, especially in sharing the available material resources, is an **essential condition** for the improvement of VET quality.

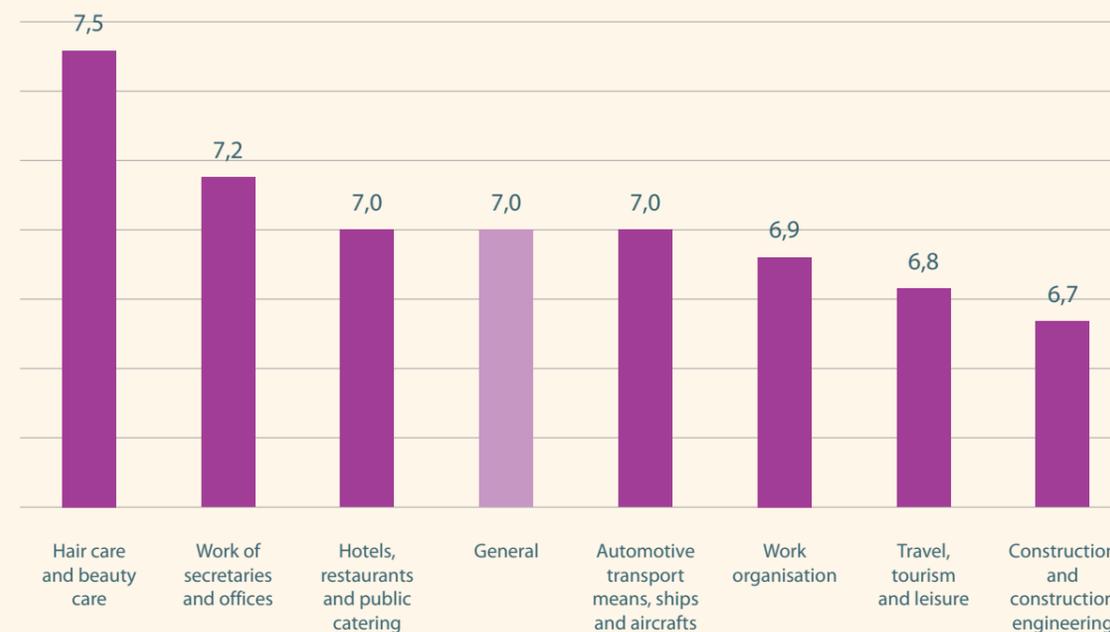


Fig. 4. Education sub-fields according to average assessments of all strategic areas

Training / learning environment

Although the results show that the quality level of this area sufficiently complies with the reference level, evaluations of certain indicators signal problems. For example, **the share of students that dropped out**. In accordance with the descriptor of quality level, this should constitute 10 % or less, but in most schools this rate is considerably higher. This trend is typical in all the assessed sub-fields of education. The National Education Strategy for 2013–2022⁹ stipulates that the percentage of the population aged 18-24, who have attained, at most, lower secondary education and are not involved in further education or training should be 8 % in 2022 (average of 10 years). This applies for VET providers as well. Therefore, it is important to find out the reasons why learners are dropping out and to plan measures to improve the situation.

Students' performance is another problematic issue. In accordance with the quality level descriptor, it is required that the performance rate of most learners (more than 50 %) would increase annually, i.e. an increasingly higher number of students should attain better personal learning marks. This would speak of the fact that a school applies appropriate measures to prompt students' motivation to learn. Unfortunately, the opposite trend was identified fairly often, i.e. in most VET institutions this rate was lower than required. Besides, according to the results of quality evaluations, it might be stated that there is a direct correlation between "dropping out" and "performance", i.e. with the deterioration of performance, the rate of student drop out increases and vice versa – when performance results improve, fewer students drop out.

Most VET providers have developed instruments to determine the opinion of both **students and teachers** on the issue of training. Most often questionnaires are used. Judging from self-analysis and evaluation reports, students and teachers are usually satisfied with the training conditions. However,

⁹ Resolution No XII-745 of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of 23 December 2013 "On the Approval of the National Education Strategy for 2013-2022", http://www.smm.lt/web/lt/teisesaktai/tei/valstybine-svietimo-strategija_1

some evaluators raise the question of whether learners are aware of conditions in other schools and whether they have any reference to compare their environment to. It may be that students are satisfied with what they have because they do not know how much better the situation could be. Therefore, study visits to other VET institutions or practical training there would be welcome to improve the implementation of all VET programmes. Mechanisms to determine opinion are usually of institutional level and say little about opinion differences according to individual VET programmes. Summarised reports of results of quality evaluations according to sub-fields of education recommend national-level survey questionnaires which would ensure the comparability of results on various levels: national, institutional, branch (according to sub-field of education) and according to individual VET programmes within the same institution.

Attention is drawn to the competence of VET providers in **strategic planning**. Such indicators as the mission and vision of a school and annual priority tasks have led to a number of discussions. Some quality evaluation participants stated that it is a subject of institutional evaluation; others said that mission and vision are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and therefore, they should not be assessed. The results of quality evaluation illustrate that often these indicators were viewed only formally. On the other hand, external evaluators pointed out that often priority tasks repeat over a number of years, that they are hard to measure, that their number is high, that participation of stakeholders in the planning process is more often “on paper” than the reality, etc. All this shows that **some VET providers lacked understanding of essence and importance of strategic management**. Given that effective functioning of an institution is determined by its capacity to envisage new opportunities, estimate changes in the market, its rivals, etc., it is recommended to enhance the strategic management competence of VET providers. In some reports of quality evaluation results in concrete sub-fields of education it is recommended to assess not only the formulations of vision and mission but also the rate of success of their implementation. In accordance with the strategic goal¹⁰ and vision¹¹ formulated in the National Education Strategy for 2013-2022, it is recommended to correct the descriptors of indicators quality level for vision, mission and priority annual tasks in quality evaluation methodology.

Analysing the results of quality evaluations one more trend was highlighted – it is not clear enough how and whether the **continuity of national projects activities** (on career, on sectoral practical training centres, on teachers’ qualification) will be ensured once the funding from the ESF finishes. Therefore, it is recommended that state institutions responsible for creating education policy and administering their implementation cooperate with VET providers to foresee measures to ensure the continuity of national project activities and allocate sufficient funds for their implementation.

As an example of **good practice** Alytus Vocational Education and Training centre could be mentioned as one which could share its experience in reducing the rate of student drop out (e.g. in the programme for small business services provider the drop out rate has been reduced from 46 % in 2012

10) The key strategic goal is to make Lithuanian education a sustainable foundation for the improvement of the state’s welfare, to educate an ambitious and independent person who will build the future of Lithuania and the world in a responsible and solidary manner.’

11) “Vision of Lithuania’s education is that every child, young and adult person in Lithuania would seek and easily find where to study, that the national education system is composed of state, municipal and non-state ever improving and inter-cooperating and cooperating with partners educational institutions where employees are authorities in the eyes of the public and hold a continuous discussion on the progress of national education, the development of fortune and culture of the state of Lithuania and its people and economic development according to the sustainable evolution of city and countryside.”

to 0 % in 2013). The centre has also developed an effective system to measure the rate of students and teachers’ satisfaction with the training / learning environment.

Vilnius Railway Transport and Services Business School provides excellent conditions for vocational teachers to participate in project activities: 33 % of teachers annually participate in international projects and 71 % – in school projects.

Telšiai Regional Vocational Education and Training centre has drafted a template for employers where they have to mark the trainee’s skills according to the competences described in standards.

Lifelong learning

As previously mentioned, the strategic evaluation area Lifelong learning was evaluated the worst in comparison to evaluations of other strategic areas. The main problem in this field is related to the **success rate of acquisition of qualification**. The pursued target is that more than 90 % of students would graduate from VET programmes. The reality is, however, different – in the majority of VET programmes this rate is much lower. The participants of quality evaluations suggest reducing this indicator to 60 %. It should be noted that there are some VET institutions where the success of graduation from VET programmes meets and even exceeds the established target (for example, non-state school Public Institution Art of Beauty). Therefore, the suggestion is to analyse the good practice of such VET providers and apply it to other institutions demonstrating poorer results. It is also recommended that each VET provider compare the success rate of different programmes within a school as self-analysis reports show that they are different. This would allow seeing differences in the organisation of training according to different VET programmes and to identify the factors which determine certain results of success more accurately. It should be noted that the success rate depends on the student dropout rate and performance results, therefore, in analysing the reasons of the problem it is very important to look at the situation in a VET institution from a complex point of view. It is also suggested to specify the indicator “Graduates continuing learning in other programmes” by defining the lower and higher levels of the programme.

According to the results of evaluations **the supply of VET programmes and courses** needs improvement. Most schools, the smaller ones in particular, provide one or several formal training programmes in a concrete sub-field of education. Programmes are often intended only for those who already have a certain level of education (primary, lower or upper secondary). The supply of non-formal training programmes or courses is underdeveloped. In fact, there are almost no courses for the improvement of qualifications of employees working in companies. Therefore, given the intensive modernisation of practical training resources (for instance, establishment of practical training centres for specific sectors), it is recommended to expand the variety of VET programmes and courses both in terms of educational attainment level and target groups (pupils/students, employees, unemployed, etc.). **Permeability between various education levels** also deserves to be looked at separately. Although VET providers have a sufficient number of contracts and agreements with other training institutions they rarely provide for the terms and criteria for mobility between the programmes of the same or different education level (for example, between VET programmes of different schools to attain the same qualification and between the upper-secondary and VET programmes). The mobility possibilities are limited by the lack of mechanisms for recognition of competences acquired while working or in other ways.

The good practice in developing the supply of training courses could be shared by Vilnius Railway Transport and Services Business School, which organises variety of lessons about implemented programmes.

Klaipėda Services and Business School is known for its effective cooperation with higher education schools in developing mobility opportunities between VET and higher education.

Alytus Vocational Education and Training centre, King Mindaugas Vocational Education and Training centre in Kaunas, and Public Institution Art of Beauty have demonstrated excellent learning success rate results (94–100 % of student successfully graduate) and could share their experience in motivating students.

Access to training

Analysis of the conditions in VET for persons with different skills levels and learning needs has showed that they are insufficient. First, it is related to the **supply of programmes offered**, which is relatively limited in terms of variety of target groups and educational attainment level (as discussed previously in the analysis of the area Lifelong learning). The analysis of quality evaluations also reveals that the possibilities of distance learning are used to a very small extent. Some participants of quality evaluations pointed out that distance learning is not a suitable approach for VET. This opinion may result from lack of knowledge. Some reports on sub-fields of education mention that there are VET providers who negatively assess the possibilities of distance VET, although they have never tried it. It has been observed that these providers lack knowledge and information on the implementation of distance learning and the benefits it brings. Therefore, schools that have good experience of distance learning practice are recommended to share it with other VET providers.

Quality evaluations revealed that almost all VET providers have clear procedures for **recognition of prior learning**. They are drafted in accordance with the Description of Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning Achievements¹². However the situation is different with regards to **recognition of work experience** – only a small number of education institutions have defined such procedures. One possible reason is the lack of national guidelines. Therefore, it is suggested to draft recommendations on evaluation of competences gained through work experience and their recognition in VET. They would help VET providers to improve access to training and in this way would facilitate the implementation of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework¹³.

Other problems in this field are linked to **statistics** and **flexibility of training conditions**. Statistics on students with special needs is insufficient (i.e. data is collected on all students in general without specifying the students with special needs). As seen from the results of evaluations, most schools claim that they provide students with facilities to learn according to **individual plans**. Evaluators noted that they could not verify these facts as evaluation process took place in summer during the school holidays. Therefore, for the meantime, there are not enough details to objectively assess the flexibility in terms of conditions for learning.

12) Order No ISAK-72 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania of 11 January 2008 "On the Approval of Description of Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning Achievements" (*Official Gazette*, 2008, No 8-297).

13) Resolution No 535 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 4 May 2010 "On the Approval of Description of Lithuanian Qualifications Framework", http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=372306&p_query=&p_tr2=

One **example of good practice** in terms of access to training is Visaginas Technology and Business Vocational Education and Training centre, which can share experience in providing distance-learning services. It has a distance-learning centre whose aim is to develop the distance-learning services to adult learners.

Vilnius Vocational Education and Training Centre for Service Business Specialists and King Mindaugas Vocational Education and Training Centre in Kaunas have kindergartens which bring double benefit: they serve as the base of practical training and provide conditions for women with small children to learn.

Alytus Vocational Education and Training centre improves access to training by placing all learning material in MOODLE learning platform.

Modernity of training

Since 2008, in order to implement the Practical VET Resources Development Programme¹⁴ an intense **update of practical training base** has taken place in many VET institutions (for instance, practical training centres for certain sectors have been established with the latest technologies and equipment). Most often modernisation is implemented using European Union funds. Most of the evaluated VET providers pointed out that the **technical base was used** effectively, i.e. it is used 8 hours a day. There were no possibilities to check these details due to the timing of the visits to educational institutions – again they were organised during the summer holidays. The quality evaluation results show that schools only seldom provide their students with opportunities to have their practical training implemented in other VET institutions. Therefore, the conclusion is drawn that practical training facilities are used insufficiently and therefore not effectively. It is recommended to encourage VET providers to cooperate on practical training issues, i.e. provide their students with opportunities to improve their skills in schools equipped with the latest technologies and equipment.

Mobility of students and vocational teachers is one more weak link of VET in Lithuania, in particular, in terms of those who come to teach or study from abroad. The reasons for this may be different – insufficient readiness of our VET institutions to host students or teachers from foreign countries, language barrier, lack information about Lithuanian VET providers in foreign languages, etc. Besides, representatives of enterprises and teachers or lecturers from other education institutions insufficiently participate in VET. This shows a certain isolation of VET providers, which possibly has a negative effect on the quality of programme implementation.

It should be noticed that modernity is also illustrated by **income** from training services provided to labour market participants (e.g. to employees, unemployed). Related earnings should comprise the major part of non-budget income. According to the data provided in self-analyses, this is the case. The problem is related to the low supply of courses. Income from services provided by learners and the production produced in the process of learning reinforces student entrepreneurship and responsibility for work results. This issue is quite sensitive and only a small proportion of VET providers could boast about their excellent results. Some participants of quality evaluations suggest eliminating this indicator, others – expanding the conception of income (i.e. to measure "not only in the amount of money").

14) Order No ISAK-2333 of the Minister of Education and Science of 3 December 2007 "On the Approval of the Practical VET Resources Development Programme" (*Official Gazette*, 2008, No 7-259).

Good practice in the field of modernity could be shared by Kaunas Information Technologies School, which provides its learners with opportunities spend their practical placement period in other VET institutions (e.g. in Kaunas Food Industry and Trade Vocational Education and Training Centre).

Alytus Vocational Education and Training centre has experience in cooperating with vocational schools and companies from abroad.

Kaunas Social Services and Construction Vocational Education and Training Centre for Business Specialists has a number of students from abroad.

Šiauliai Vocational Education and Training Centre barter their services (exchange of services with their partners).

Klaipėda Sewing and Service Business School is an example of how to activate and motivate learners to serve clients.

Correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy

This area is defined by criteria related to programme preparation and update, teachers' professional development, efficiency of assessment of competences acquired by learners, employment of graduates, employers' satisfaction, etc. Most VET providers have established **programme development and update** mechanisms and have defined indicators for monitoring programme implementation. This is a result of the national project for internal quality management systems implementation in VET institutions. Nevertheless, it was quite complicated to measure how these mechanisms function in reality and how effective they are because the evaluations were carried out during the summer. Based on the remarks of evaluators, it might be stated that vocational teachers themselves develop and update programmes quite often, and stakeholders take a passive role in this process. Seminars intended to discuss the results of quality evaluation highlighted the problem that VET providers find it difficult to identify economic needs and to design training programmes accordingly. It should be noted that publicly available economic forecasts are of approximately 3-years duration and are of general nature, i.e. without any focus on individual sectors of the economy. Obviously, it takes at least three years to train a specialist. In addition, some time is needed to prepare a programme and to validate it. The situation might be improved by the results of other national project intended for the development of modular VET system and implementation of qualifications framework. However, this doesn't solve the problem of forecasting economic developments and the absence of such a forecast makes it difficult to estimate the correspondence of qualifications provided by VET and higher education institutions to the needs of the economy. It is, therefore, recommended to mandate an institution responsible for the development of the economy to regularly prepare medium-term and long-term forecasts on the development of the economy and individual sectors on a national and regional levels. This should be the basis for formulating demand on qualifications to the education system.

Employability of graduates differs from one programme to another. It ranges from less than 20 % to 100 %. In larger cities this rate is usually higher than in other locations. This situation may be due to differences of VET quality in rural and urban areas (e.g. possibilities for modernising the technical base), insufficient correspondence of programmes to the needs of the local market (linked to the problem of forecasting economic developments), lack of cooperation among VET providers in practi-

cal training, etc. In the opinion of both evaluators and self-analysis teams, to collect data for monitoring of graduates employment is quite complicated. Therefore, it is recommended to calculate certain indicators centrally, using national databases¹⁵ – in this case it would be possible to use the available information of State Social Insurance Fund (SODRA).

Funds for **teachers' professional qualification development** are planned as part of the student basket. Therefore, participants of quality evaluations offer to replace the indicator "Conditions for updating of professional qualification" (i.e. amount of money intended for improvement of teachers' qualifications) by an indicator meant to measure the **readiness of vocational teachers to effectively perform practical training**. Judging from reports on sub-fields of education, the situation with regard to improvement of professional qualification is quite good in all sub-fields. This might be affected by the national project, which aimed at providing vocational teachers with technological competences to work in a new training base of sectoral practical training centres. One of the results of the project was the model developed for improvement of vocational teachers' qualification¹⁶. It determined that the main designers of programmes and VET teachers training providers are organisations of employers and employees, enterprises and sectoral practical training centres. Project activities were implemented using the ESF funds (total value of the project amounted to almost LTL 21 million¹⁷). Therefore, if there is a lack of state budget funds there is a risk related to the continuation of technological competence improvement, which might negatively affect the quality of VET. This could be reduced by using the **scheme of social partnership** intended to improve technological competences of vocational teachers more effectively. Attention should be drawn to the **participation of vocational teachers in project activities** where not only professional but also general competencies (for example, teamwork) are developed. Some VET providers are not engaged in any project activities, a fairly small number of vocational teachers participate in international projects. One possible measure to improve the situation could be the promotion of cooperation among VET providers in preparing and implementing projects.

The criteria regarding effective evaluation of competences acquired by learners are also treated as a link of correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy which needs improvement. This is related to organisation of **skills competitions** and participation in them. Trends are similar in all sub-fields of education, i.e. most VET providers organise only school-level skills competitions, a very small number of Lithuanian VET representatives take part in international skills competitions. Participation in international events increases awareness about the system of education of the country and its attractiveness to other countries. Therefore, both the state and VET providers themselves should devote an appropriate amount of time and attention to the development of **internationalisation within skills competitions**.

Although **employers' satisfaction** with graduates' qualifications is measured quite well, the regularity of surveys and certain comments in assessment reports, however, lead to doubt about these assessments. First, attention should be drawn to the fact that evaluators had no opportunity to communicate with enterprises. Second, both the assessment reports and the results during the discussions voiced the opinion that there are suspicions about the objectivity of the employer's survey. Third, there is a lack of mechanisms for research of employers opinion. The reports on quality evaluation according in sub-fields of education include recommendations to prepare instruments to measure employers'

¹⁵ This practice is applied in assessing the quality of study programmes or quality of performance of higher education institutions.

¹⁶ <http://www.pmdtk.upc.smm.lt/modelis.pdf>

¹⁷ http://www.pmdtk.upc.smm.lt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=1&lang=lt

satisfaction with graduates' qualifications and to regularly survey not only enterprises where students do their practical training but also those companies employing VET graduates.

Alytus Vocational Education and Training Centre could share its **good practice** in ensuring correspondence of qualifications to the needs of the economy. It has established clear indicators to monitor the quality of programme implementation. The centre's teachers take an active part in regional, national and international projects and in this way expand their professional knowledge and improve their communication and cooperation skills.

Efficiency of information and career planning

Efficiency of information and career planning meets the descriptors of quality level the best of all compared to other strategic evaluation areas. This shows that VET providers devote a sufficient attention to information. The main reason for this is a target of VET providers to attract as many students as possible. Schools use various ways of disseminating information and have **information and career planning specialists**. The latter are trained from the ESF funds. Therefore, ensuring continuation of national project activities is a relevant problem in all evaluation areas including this one too. Employers' participation in career education activities (in terms of provision of opportunities for students and active personal participation) is another problematic area.

There have been some comments that **students' expectations regarding career planning** and satisfaction with consultations provided are little analysed. It is, therefore, recommended to improve the quality of students information and career planning so that learners could choose the occupation which they would like and which would be appropriate for them.

Planning of student admission is the area of information and career planning efficiency which needs improvement most. Usually when planning the number of students to be admitted schools refer to the minimum number of students in a group defined by the Ministry of Education and Science. This means that the planned numbers change little. However, one of the basic requirements for VET is that it should be implemented in a way which would best suit student, employer and public needs, what already makes the planning of student admission complicated. Similar to the case of correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy, the situation is even more aggravated by the absence of medium-term and long-term forecasts about the economical and sectoral developments on the national and regional level.

To summarise the results of evaluation in this area it is recommended to correct the methodologies by **tightening the requirements for the quality** in this area.

Examples of good practice to be followed:

- » It has been noticed that some VET providers apply very interesting way of information dissemination. For example, Tauragė Vocational Education and Training Centre and Šilutė Tourism and Service Business School have museums. Panevėžys Margarita Rimkevičaitė Technological School produce jam and honey in their own school, which serves as gifts to their guests.
- » King Mindaugas Vocational Education and Training Centre in Kaunas has 76 specialists who can consult students on career issues. Information and career planning is adapted to the chil-

dren from general education schools and special boarding schools. To implement these activities various non-profit organisations are addressed.

- » The Šiauliai and Alytus VET centres could share their practice related to modern and effective ways disseminating information.

SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF QUALITY OF VET PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO QUALITY CYCLE STAGES

The quality cycle involves **four stages**: planning, implementation, evaluation and review. Their evaluations (average values in sub-fields) are presented in Fig. 5. It shows that the **evaluation** stage of the quality cycle was evaluated worst. The latter is perhaps the most important element in the quality assurance system, as it demonstrates what results have been achieved on a personal and systematic level and to what degree the goals of the programme and the VET provider were accomplished. In accordance with the methodologies, the stage of evaluation is characterised by such indicators as drop-out rate, performance, learning success rate, employment, occupation, employers' satisfaction, etc. Evaluation is closely related to the stage of **implementation**. The latter encompasses a wide range of activities and is defined by such indicators as student and teacher mobility, teachers' qualification, skills competitions, supply of programmes, participation in project activities, income for provided services, etc. The fact that this stage was also evaluated as being among the weakest leads to concerns about the efficiency of quality assurance in VET institutions.

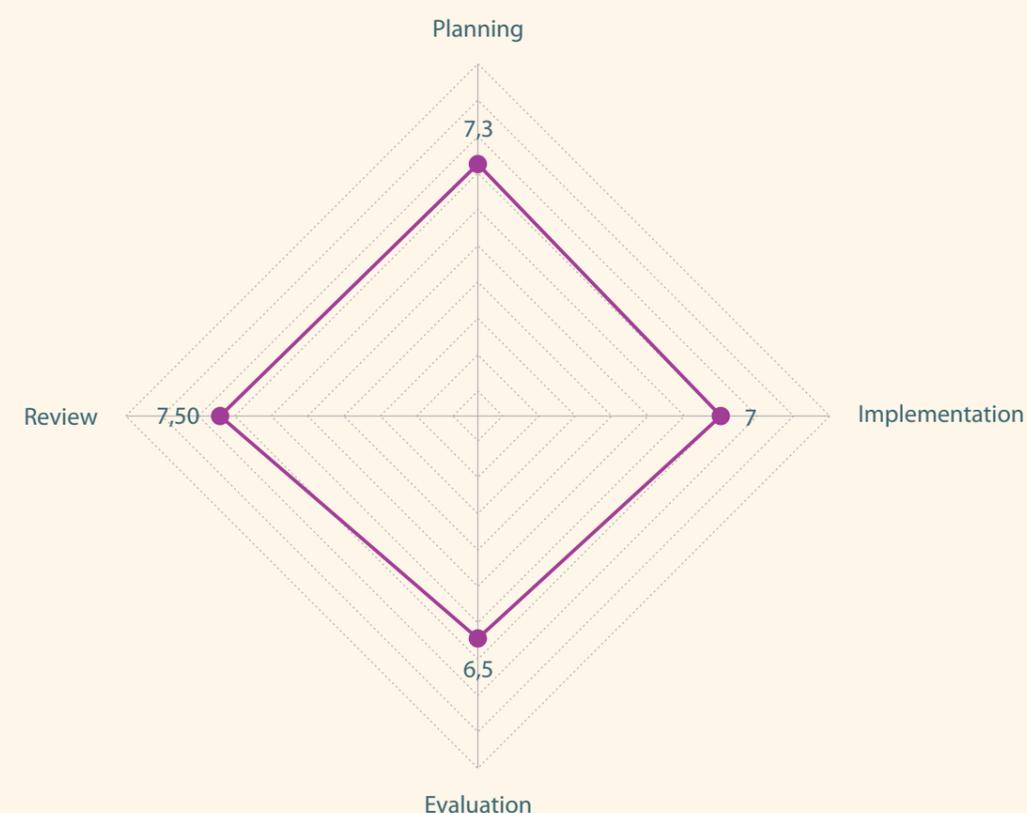


Fig. 5. Summarised results of quality evaluations in sub-fields of education according to quality cycle stages

Taking into consideration the scores of implementation and evaluation stages, there are some doubts about the objectivity of evaluation of **review stage**. The latter involves the development of a quality culture (i.e. how improvement measures are determined, how they are made public, etc.). Indicators defining this aspect were criticised by both self-analysis teams and by evaluators. It is, therefore, recommended that **descriptors of quality level of indicators characterising this stage be specified** by adjusting them to concrete evaluation areas. The indicators of **planning** involve planning the supply of courses and programmes, programme update, mobility opportunities, efficiency of information. All these indicators were discussed in a previous section, and will not be repeated here. Apart from the mentioned measures to improve the VET quality, it is suggested to promote participation of stakeholders and social partners, in particular, in VET and to enhance cooperation with social partners in all strategic evaluation areas.

The above-described trends of evaluation of quality assurance cycle stages are typical to all sub-fields of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF VET PROGRAMMES AND VET QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

- » **Quality evaluation process:** to carry out evaluations of quality only during education process; to form groups of assessors by engaging representatives of students, representatives of employers, representatives from other countries, if available; a group of evaluators should contain at least one person who has experience of working according to methodologies for quality evaluation; training in the field of external quality evaluation according to methodologies are obligatory to all members of self-evaluation teams and experts carrying out quality evaluation; after the first quality evaluation in a specific sub-field of education it is recommended to organise a meeting of evaluators where they can discuss the problems noticed and agree on a common understanding of certain subjects; it is recommended to form a bank of evaluators and to continuously update it; summary reports of sub-fields must be prepared by those who have participated in the majority of the quality evaluation visits in that particular sub-field of education; VET providers participating in the evaluation must be informed of quality evaluation goals, objectives and benefit.
- » **Strategic evaluation area “Training / learning environment”:** to foresee measures for improving strategic planning capacities of managers at all levels; to involve stakeholders in the planning process, to promote cooperation with employers; to identify the reasons for students dropping out and to plan measures to reduce this rate; to standardise process for determining student and teacher satisfaction with the training / learning environment; to foresee measures for the continuation of national projects (on career, sectorial centres, teachers’ qualification) when only state budget funds will be used; to involve the representatives of employers and of their associate members, in particular, in the institutional management of VET.
- » **Strategic evaluation area “Lifelong learning”:** to expand the supply of programmes and courses; to improve the success rate (identify the reasons and plan the measures, to continuously monitor the process); to ensure mobility opportunities between different sectors of

education (e.g. draft and approve a procedure for recognition of competences acquired while working or in other ways; to conclude agreements between VET providers and define subjects that can be recognised; to disseminate information on opportunities available).

- » **Strategic evaluation area “Access to training”:** to draft national recommendations for evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through work experience or in non-formal training in VET; to determine what are demands for learning for people with special needs and to provide them with conditions appropriate for learning; to promote the implementation of distance learning (full-time, part-time, etc.) in every possible way.
- » **Strategic evaluation area “Modernity of training”:** to develop student and teacher mobility; look for measures to increase earnings from provided training and other services and production; to involve stakeholders and representatives of companies, in particular, in the renewal of the material base; to achieve 100 % efficiency of using the training base, to provide students with opportunities to do their practical training in other VET institutions (e.g. in sectoral centres), to activate the participation of representatives of companies and representatives of other schools in the education process; to provide measures for continuous update of the training base (when ESF funds are no longer available).
- » **Strategic evaluation area “Correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy”:** to develop teachers’ qualification improvement system, especially of their practical skills, (internships in companies, sectoral companies, foreign countries, participation of other schools in project activities, etc.); to use the scheme of social partnership in a more efficient way for the development of vocational teachers technological competences; to devote appropriate attention and adequate funding to the representation of Lithuanian VET in international skills competitions; to develop mechanisms to regularly survey the opinion of employers; institutions responsible for economic development should regularly prepare medium-term and long-term forecasts on the development of the economy and individual sectors on a national and regional level.
- » **Strategic evaluation area “Efficiency of information and career planning”:** to improve the planning of student admission taking into consideration the forecasts of economic developments and by analysing the needs of students and cooperating with social partners; after finalisation of the national project for career education development, to ensure the continuation of its activities (employment of specialists, etc.); to improve the quality of student information and career planning so that learners can choose the profession they like and which suits them; to promote active participation of employers in activities intended for career development; to correct the methodologies by **tightening the requirements for quality** in this area.
- » **Quality cycle:** in addition to the aforementioned, it is suggested to promote a more active participation of all stakeholders and social partners, in particular, in VET planning process; to enhance cooperation with social partners in all strategic areas; when planning annual priority tasks, to take into consideration the results of review; to correct the methodology for assessment: specify the descriptor of quality level of the criterion “quality culture is being developed”, specify the indicator of programme renewal/update; to encourage VET providers to disseminate and share all available examples of good practice in a more intense manner. It is also suggested to systematise the examples of good practice and make them available to all VET providers once the quality assessments are finalised.

ANNEX. STRATEGIC EVALUATION AREAS, STAGES OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CYCLE, CRITERIA, INDICATORS

Strategic evaluation areas: TRAINING/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Planning	Focus on the development of a constantly learning person, open to changes, creative and responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission and vision of VET provider • Annual priority objectives of VET provider
	Goals are known to VET provider's community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants of renewal/update of priority annual tasks
Implementation	Attractive learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement of satisfaction with environment • Student feedback • Teacher feedback
Evaluation	Learning-motivating environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share of students who dropped out (failed to graduate the programme and do not study) • Student performance
Review	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures for improvement of activities
	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas: LIFELONG LEARNING

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Planning	Various trainings courses are provided on the level of sub-field of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply of programmes • Supply of courses and lessons
	Possibilities for permeability between different education sectors are provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibilities of permeability between different education sectors
Evaluation	Learning is successfully finished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates – students that have acquired qualification certificates
	Continuation of learning in other programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates (students that have acquired qualification certificates), continuing learning in other programmes
Review	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures for improvement of activities
	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas: ACCESS TO TRAINING

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Implementation	Possibilities for students with different skills levels and learning needs are provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for recognition of learning or work experience • Programmes provided • Students • Vocational teachers
Evaluation	Students with different needs successfully graduate and are employed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates (students that have acquired qualification certificates) with different needs
Review	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures for improvement of activities
	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas: MODERNITY OF TRAINING

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Implementation	Training meets the up-to-date level of science, technologies and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewal of technical base • Effectiveness of using the technical base • Income for services provided • Students • Types of training/learning material • Companies and other VET providers • Teachers • Methodological resources • Training methods
Review	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures for improvement of activities
	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas: CORRESPONDENCE OF QUALIFICATION TO THE NEEDS OF THE ECONOMY OF LITHUANIA

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Planning	Programmes are developed and regularly updated according to the needs of the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs for programme development and update Number of programmes in a sub-field of education updated in a year Updating of programmes
	Indicators for monitoring of the quality of programme implementation are established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicators for monitoring of the quality of programme implementation
Implementation	Teachers continuously improve their qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conditions for updating of professional qualification Participation in project activities Updating of professional (occupational) and pedagogical qualification
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methods for assessment of competences Skills competitions Participants of skills competitions
	Effective assessment of competences acquired by students	
Evaluation	Quality of programme implementation is assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of programme implementation
	High graduate employability rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment of graduates (students that have acquired qualification certificates)
	Employers are satisfied with graduates' qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers' feedback
Review	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures for improvement of activities
	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas: EFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION AND CAREER PLANNING

Stages of quality improvement cycle	Criteria	Indicators
Planning	Effective information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information policy Information specialists Ways of information
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance in relation to career planning issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratio of those accepted to those planned to be admitted Employment rate of graduates (students that have acquired qualification certificates) Meeting student expectations
Implementation	Qualified assistance to every student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistance in relation to career planning issues
	Effective admission of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratio of those accepted to those planned to be admitted
Evaluation	High graduate employability rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment rate of graduates (students that have acquired qualification certificates) Meeting student expectations
	Quality culture is being developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures for improvement of activities
Review	Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination of the results of programme implementation

Strategic evaluation areas	Stages of quality assurance cycle			
	<i>Planning: criteria</i>	<i>Implementation: criteria</i>	<i>Evaluation: criteria</i>	<i>Review: criteria</i>
Training / learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the development of a constantly learning person, open to changes, creative and responsible Goals known to the VET provider's community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attractive learning environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning-motivating environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders
Lifelong learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various trainings courses are provided on the level of sub-field of education Possibilities for permeability between different education sectors are provided 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning is successfully finished Continuation of learning in other programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders
Access to training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibilities for students with different skills levels and needs to learn are provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with different needs successfully graduate and are employed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders
Modernity of training		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training meets the up-to-date level of science, technologies and culture 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders
Correspondence of qualification to the needs of the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes are developed and regularly updated according to the needs of the economy Indicators for monitoring of the quality of programme implementation are established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers continuously improve their qualification Effective assessment of competences acquired by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of programme implementation is assessed High graduate employability rates Employers are satisfied with graduates' qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders
Efficiency of information and career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualified assistance to every student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective admission of students High graduate employability rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality culture is being developed Information about programme implementation is accessible to all stakeholders

