

Certification development framework: assuring the quality of career practitioners

The certification framework is being developed as part of ErasmusPlus project ‘QUAL-IM-G’. In this project, partners from six European countries – Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway and The Netherlands – worked together with the goal of improving the implementation of quality assurance in career guidance. Noloc, being an expert partner within this project, is responsible for developing the certification development framework presented. Noloc is the Dutch professional association for career guidance professionals and jobcoaches, having almost 3,000 members of whom over half has obtained the Noloc quality mark for career professionals.

Why assuring the quality of career practitioners?

The European labour market is rapidly changing. Flexicurity, robotization, lifelong learning and mobility of labour across borders (national and sectoral) are the main drivers for change and innovation. This not only challenges where and how we work but also when and why we work. In addition, aging Europe results in a working population that has to work longer, asking for more awareness and guidance towards ‘second careers’. Added to this is the trend of personalising the learning needed for staying tuned in to the labour market. In short: our work paradigm is in transition, since the importance of jobs is fading and the importance of careers emerges. Career guidance and career guidance professionals are important beacons of light in facilitating this transition for both organisations and individuals.

Individual career guidance practitioners, organisations offering guidance services, and educational institutions are trying hard to keep up with these labour market developments, and fill in their role as beacons of light. What is needed is a clear vision from an educational, social and economic point of view of how to assure the quality of those involved in guiding people into the labour market of the future.

Why a certification development framework?

There are numerous quality marks in the field of career guidance, both for individuals and for organisations. Often, those quality marks are quite difficult to compare, especially in their underlying rationales and considerations. On the other hand, it has proven to be rather difficult to develop coherent quality assurance systems that meet actual needs, since more often than not they are based on desired outcomes – ‘it must be ISO’ – instead of the underlying needs itself.

In order to meet the combined challenge of a) being able to compare the underlying rationales of existing quality marks in the field of career guidance, and b) being able to develop a coherent, needs-based quality assurance system for career guidance practitioners, the certification framework developed as part of the QUAL-IM-G project is based on three principles:

1. It must be generic enough to deal with specific needs and circumstances of different target groups, sectors or countries;
2. It must be specific enough to grasp the essentials involved in the development of a quality assurance framework specifically targeted on the certification of the profession of ‘career guidance practitioners’;
3. It must focus on actual needs instead of desired outcomes.

To meet those principles, the certification framework developed has two cornerstones:

- a) it is based on building blocks, elements that *could* be part of the quality assurance system;
- b) it is based on *asking questions*, rather than providing answers.

During the QUAL-IM-G project, the certification framework has been tested in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, both countries that are in the middle of the process of setting up a quality standard for career guidance practitioners for the first time. The framework also forms the basis of integration of the two existing quality marks for career guidance professionals in the Netherlands – the Noloc quality mark and the CMI quality mark – into the development of a new, national quality mark for career guidance professionals.

The foundations of the framework: identifying building blocks

The certification framework for career guidance practitioners – presented in Appendix 1 – consists of seven building blocks, each consisting of one or more sub-blocks:

- Agreeing on the fundamentals of the quality mark
- Agreeing on the professional profile
- Agreeing on the testing framework
- Designing the mentoring process
- Designing the certification process
- Designing the recertification process
- Designing the organizational framework

The framework itself is being built up by providing answers to the questions raised in each sub-block. Providing different answers, will lead to different outcomes and – therefore – different frameworks. This way of developing and implementing makes the framework both a highly flexible concept, as well as a concept that can be fully adapted to local, sectoral or national needs and circumstances.

In this document, an overview of the main questions to be raised when developing a certification framework will be provided, using the structure of building blocks and sub-blocks. Of course, it is up to the certification framework development team to either skip questions or add additional questions.

Building block 1: Agreeing on the fundamentals of the quality mark



Main questions to be raised:

- Who will be the holder of the quality mark?
- What will be the name of the quality mark?
- What will be the target group of the quality mark?
- Will the quality mark be an overall quality mark, or will there be any specializations?
- Will the quality mark constitute different levels – for example basis and senior – of certification?
- What will be the scope of the quality mark? Individuals, organizations, both?
- Will the quality mark be protected from misuse from others? If so, how?
- Will there be a separate register for those who have obtained the quality mark? If so, who will be the holder of this register?
- How long will a certification obtained stay valid? And a recertification?
- What will be the (maximum) cost of the (re)certifying process? And who will pay for it?
- What will be the cost of registering in the register? Is this a one time cost, or annually?

Building block 2: Agreeing on the professional profile



Main questions to be raised:

- Will we develop our own professional profile, or will we adopt an existing one?
- What is our definition of 'the profession'?
- What are the task areas the professionals working in our defined profession deal with? At what level?
- What is the level of education required? What are the disciplines of education required?
- What is the amount of work experience required?
- What are the knowledge areas the professionals working in our defined profession need to master? At what level?
- Which specific tasks the professionals working in our defined profession need to master? At what level?
- Which competences the professionals working in our defined profession need to master? At what level?
- Will we develop a matrix of competences, combining competences per task area? If so, do we also differentiate between levels of mastering per competence and/or task area?
- Which elements of professional attitude are relevant for our profession?

Building block 3: Agreeing on the testing framework



Main questions to be raised:

- Which elements are to be included in the portfolio of the candidate? For example: curriculum vitae, diplomas, certificates, proof of mastering relevant methods/techniques/ instruments, case descriptions, recommendations of clients, signed code of conducts, etc.
- In which form the portfolio should be handed in? For example: by e-mail, by post, by a secured system provided by the testing organization, etc.
- What are the educational requirements the candidate should meet, both generic and profession-specific. At what level? How should the candidate prove s/he meets the criteria?
- What is the required work experience, both generic and profession-specific? How should it be proven or demonstrated? By handing in a curriculum vitae? By seeking proof from relevant employers? By providing a list of coachees, including period and time spent on each coachee?
- Are there any compulsory task areas or specific tasks the candidate has to have knowledge of and/or experience with? If so, which task areas or specific tasks? At what level? And how to prove by the candidate?
- Are there any compulsory knowledge areas the candidates should have knowledge of? If so, which knowledge areas? At what level? And how to prove by the candidate?
- Do candidates have to prove they master certain guidance specific methods, techniques and instruments? If so, which guidance specific methods, techniques and instruments? At what level of mastering (basic, profound, expert)? And how to prove by the candidate?
- Do candidates have to prove they master profession-specific competences? If so, what competences? (for example: empathy, effective communication, reflective skills, self-reflective skills, advising, coaching) At what level? And how to prove by the candidate?
- Do candidates have to show they act according to professional standards in terms of attitude? For example, by signing a code of conduct or code of ethics? Do they have to provide examples how they act accordingly? For example, by case studies or by means of an interview with an assessor.

Building block 4: Designing the mentoring process



Main questions to be raised:

- Will a mentor be available to help candidates preparing for their certification?
- What are the requirements of becoming a mentor, if any?
- Will there be an initial mentor training programme for new mentors?
- Will there be an ongoing mentor training for existing mentors?
- What are the requirements of becoming a mentee, if any?
- Will there be a formal mentee programme for mentees?
- Will there be offered individual mentee counselling?

Sub-block 4.1: Mentor requirements



Main questions to be raised:

- What will be the requirements to become a mentor?
- Does a mentor have obtained the quality mark him- or herself?
- Are there any other additional substantive requirements, for example with respect to proven mentoring competencies, being a ‘senior’ guidance practitioner in terms of amount of guidance specific work experience or dealing with a diversity of client situations, etc.?
- Are there any requirements regarding the amount of time a mentor should be available for mentoring?
- Will there be an initial mentor training programme? For mentors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend the initial mentor training, when provided?
- Will there be an ongoing mentor training programme? For mentors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend ongoing mentor training activities, when provided?
- Will new mentors be assessed with respect to their suitability of becoming a mentor? If so, how and by whom this assessment will take place?
- Will mentors be financially compensated for their work? If so, how much will they receive? Who will pay for it?
- Will a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of mentors, and the activities they provide? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 4.2: Initial mentor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an initial mentor training programme?
- What will be the goal of the initial mentor training?
- How is the initial mentor training being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the initial mentor training? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the initial mentor training programme be offered?
- For mentors, is the initial mentor training to be attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the initial mentor training programme be organized?
- What will be the costs of the initial mentor training programme? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the initial mentor training programme? If so, how does this procedure look like?

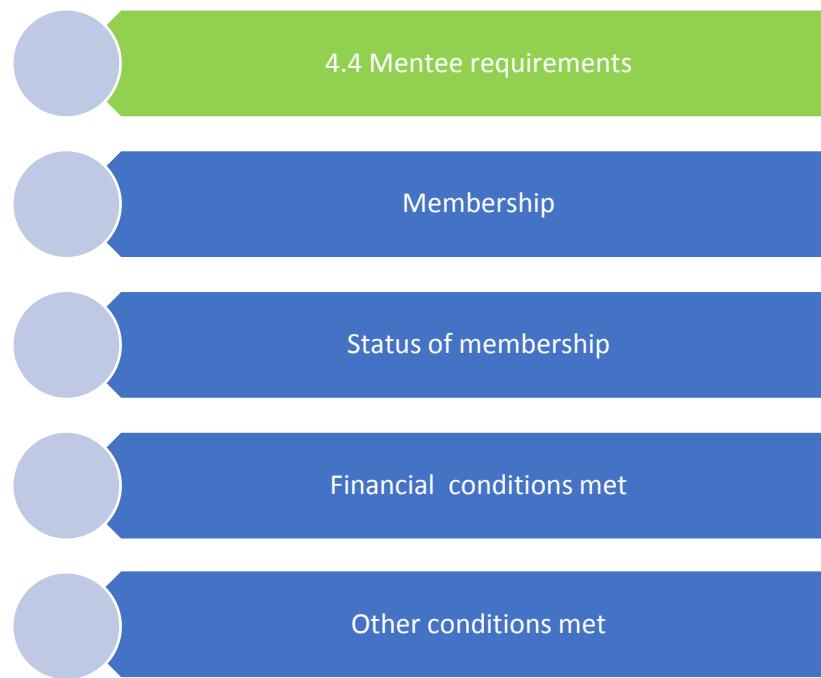
Sub-block 4.3: Ongoing mentor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an ongoing mentor training programme / activities?
- What will be the goal of the ongoing mentor training / activities?
- How are the ongoing mentor activities being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? Intervision? Supervision? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the ongoing mentor training activities? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the ongoing mentor training activities be offered?
- For mentors, are the ongoing mentor training activities to be attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the ongoing mentor training activities be organized?
- What will be the costs of the ongoing mentor training activities to be organized? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the ongoing mentor training programme / activities? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 4.4: Mentee requirements



Main questions to be raised:

- Will the mentee programme be open for members only? Will there be different mentee programmes for members and non-members?
- Will the mentee programme be open for all members? Will there be different mentee programmes for different kinds of members?
- What, if any, are the financial conditions that should be met before one can join the mentee programme?
- What, if any, are the other conditions that should be met before one can join the mentee programme?

Sub-block 4.5: Mentee programme



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be a mentee programme?
- What will be the goal of the mentee programme? Preparation of the portfolio to be handed in? Preparation of the actual assessment? Facilitating broader personal development, whether or not linked to the process of recertification? Other?
- How is the mentee programme being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? One session? Multiple sessions? Group sessions? One-on-one-sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the mentee programme? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often the mentee programme will be offered?
- For mentees, is the mentee programme to be attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the mentee programme be organized?
- What will be the costs of the mentee programme? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the mentee programme? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 4.6: Individual mentee counselling



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be provided a possibility for individual mentee counselling?
- What will be the goal of the individual mentee counselling?
- How is the individual mentee counselling being provided? Face to face? Online? One session? Multiple sessions? Supervision? Counselling-upon-request? Etc.
- Will there be any subscribed contents with respect to individual mentee counselling?
- How often will individual counselling be offered to mentees?
- For mentees, is individual counselling taking place on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the individual mentee counselling activities be organized?
- What will be the costs of individual mentee counselling? Who will pay for it?
- Will a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the individual counselling being provided to mentees? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Building block 5: Designing the certification process



Main questions to be raised:

- What method(s) of testing will be used?
- How will the assessment itself take place? How is feedback to the candidate being provided?
- How will the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process be assured?
- What will be the assessor requirements, if any?
- Will there be an initial training programme for assessors?
- Will there be an ongoing training programme / activities for assessors?

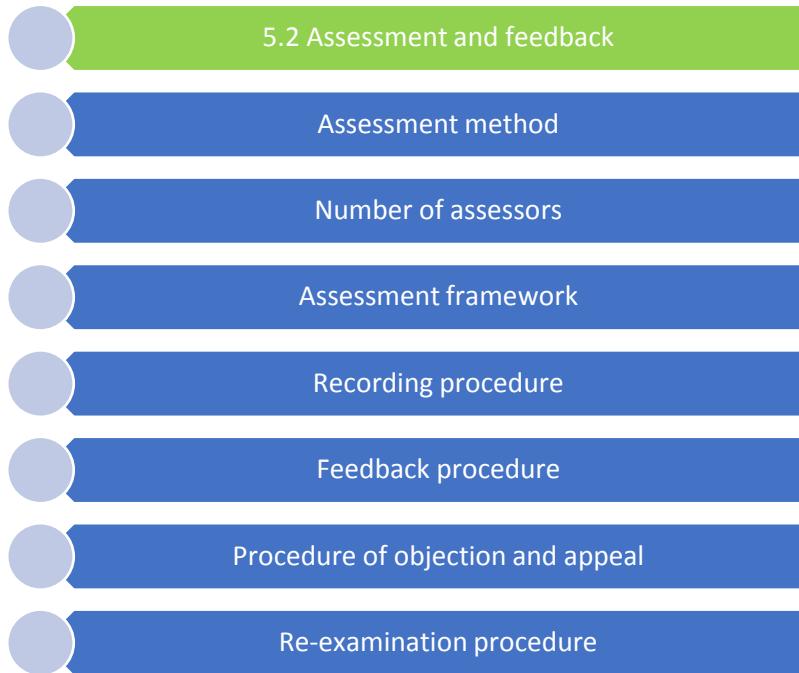
Sub-block 5.1: Method of testing



Main questions to be raised:

- What will be the goal of the testing? For example, to prove/show the candidate meets the requirements being set in the testing framework.
- Which method(s) of testing will be used? For example, by assessing a portfolio, by means of self-reflection, by means of an oral interview, by means of a written exam, or a combination.
- What will be the contents of the actual testing? How it will be decided whether or not a candidate meets the requirements?
- When will the testing be offered? During the year? At certain time periods? On specific moments? At one place? At multiple places? Online? By skype or video-connection?
- How should candidates apply for testing?
- What will be the cost of testing the candidate? How should it be paid? By whom should it be paid?

Sub-block 5.2: Assessment and feedback



Main questions to be raised:

- What assessment methods(s) will be used?
- What will be the number of assessors?
- What will be the assessment framework? Will there be objective guidelines for scoring / interpreting the assessment results? How will they look like? What will be the criteria for failing / passing the assessment? Will they be made clear in advance to the candidate? How?
- How will the assessment results be recorded?
- How will the assessment results be communicated towards the candidate?
- Do candidates have the possibility to object and appeal? By whom? How will the procedure look like?
- When failing, do candidates have the possibility to apply for re-examination? When? How often? How does the re-examination procedure look like? What will be the costs? Paid by whom?

Sub-block 5.3: Assuring the quality of the testing process



Main questions to be raised:

- Which regulations have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process? How will they look like?
- Which procedures have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process? How will they look like?
- What kind of surveillance system has to be developed in order to monitor the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process?
- What are the possibilities of enforcement when the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process is not being met? How does the accompanying procedure look like? Who will have the authority to decide on enforcement measures?
- What assurances are in place that there is a continuous focus on improving the quality of the testing aspects of the certification process? Who is responsible for this process?

Sub-block 5.4: Assessor requirements



Main questions to be raised:

- Are there any requirements to become an assessor?
- Does an assessor have obtained the quality mark him- or herself?
- Are there any other additional substantive requirements, for example with respect to proven assessing competencies, being a 'senior' guidance practitioner in terms of amount of guidance specific work experience or dealing with a diversity of client situations, etc.?
- Are there any requirements regarding the amount of time an assessor should be available for assessing?
- Will there be an initial assessor training programme? For assessors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend the initial assessor training, when provided?
- Will there be an ongoing assessor training programme? For assessors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend ongoing assessor training activities, when provided?
- Will new assessors be assessed with respect to their suitability of becoming an assessor? If so, how and by whom this assessment will take place?
- Will assessors be financially compensated for their work? If so, how much will they receive? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of assessors, and the activities they provide? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 5.5: Initial assessor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an initial assessor training programme?
- What will be the goal of the initial assessor training?
- How is the initial assessor training being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the initial assessor training? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the initial assessor training programme be offered?
- For assessors, is the initial assessor training to be attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the initial assessor training programme be organized?
- What will be the costs of the initial assessor training programme? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the initial assessor training programme? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 5.6: Ongoing assessor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an ongoing assessor training programme / activities?
- What will be the goal of the ongoing assessor training / activities?
- How are the ongoing assessor activities being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? Intervision? Supervision? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the ongoing assessor training activities? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the ongoing assessor training activities be offered?
- For assessors, are the ongoing assessor training activities to be attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the ongoing assessor training activities be organized?
- What will be the costs of the ongoing assessor training activities to be organized? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure in place regarding the quality of the ongoing assessor training programme / activities? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Building block 6: Designing the re-certification process



Main questions to be raised:

- How will the re-certification process be organized within the organization?
- What method(s) of testing will be used?
- How will the assessment itself take place? How is feedback to the candidate being provided?
- How will the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process be assured?
- What will be the assessor requirements, if any?
- Will there be an initial training programme for assessors?
- Will there be an ongoing training programme / activities for assessors?

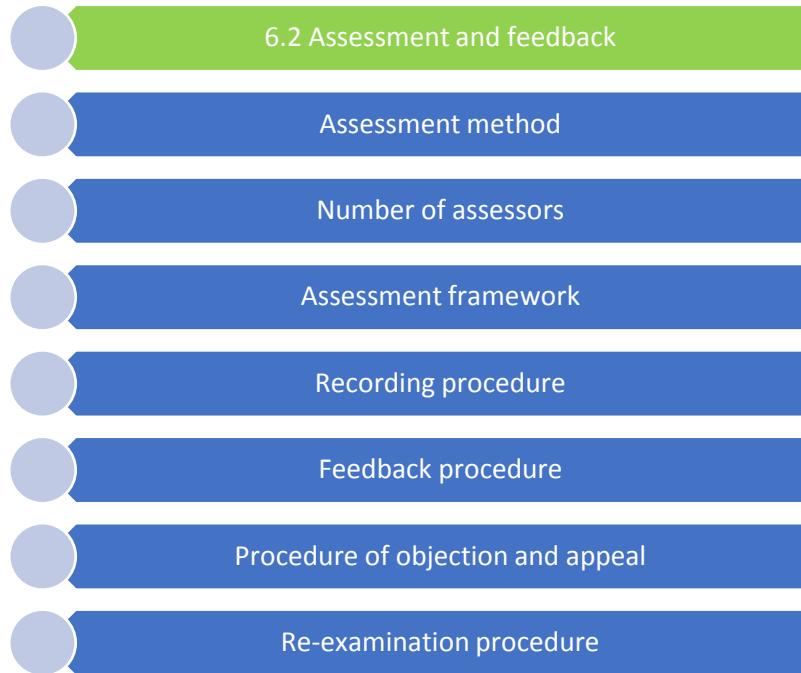
Sub-block 6.1: Method of testing



Main questions to be raised:

- What will be the goal of the testing? For example, to prove/show the candidate has ‘grown’ in his or her capacity of being a professional career guidance practitioner.
- Which method(s) of testing will be used? For example, by handing in a dossier consisting of one or more elements, by means of an oral interview, by means of a written exam, or a combination.
- What will be the contents of the actual testing?
- When will the testing be offered? During the year? At certain time periods? On specific moments? At one place? At multiple places? Online? By skype or video-connection?
- How should candidates apply for testing?
- What will be the cost of testing the candidate? How should it be paid? By whom should it be paid?

Sub-block : Assessment and feedback



Main questions to be raised:

- What assessment methods(s) will be used?
- What will be the number of assessors?
- What will be the assessment framework? Will there be objective guidelines for scoring / interpreting the assessment results? How will they look like? What will be the criteria for failing / passing the assessment? Will they be made clear in advance to the candidate? How?
- How will the assessment results be recorded?
- How will the assessment results be communicated towards the candidate?
- Do candidates have the possibility to object and appeal? By whom? How will the procedure look like?
- When failing, do candidates have the possibility to apply for re-examination? When? How often? How does the re-examination procedure look like? What will be the costs? Paid by whom?

Sub-block 6.3: Assuring the quality of the testing process



Main questions to be raised:

- Which regulations have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process? What will they look like?
- Which procedures have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process? What will they look like?
- What kind of surveillance system has to be developed in order to monitor the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process?
- What are the possibilities of enforcement when the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process is not being met? How does the accompanying procedure look like? Who will have the authority to decide on enforcement measures?
- What assurance is in place that there is a continuous focus on improving the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process? Who is responsible for this process?

Sub-block 6.4: Assessor requirements



Main questions to be raised:

- Are there any requirements to become an assessor?
- Does an assessor have obtained the quality mark him- or herself?
- Are there any other additional substantive requirements, for example with respect to proven assessing competencies, being a 'senior' guidance practitioner in terms of amount of guidance specific work experience or dealing with a diversity of client situations, etc.?
- Are there any requirements regarding the amount of time an assessor should be available for assessing?
- Will there be an initial assessor training programme? For assessors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend the initial assessor training, when provided?
- Will there be an ongoing assessor training programme? For assessors, is it voluntarily or mandatory to attend ongoing assessor training activities, when provided?
- Will new assessors be assessed with respect to their suitability of becoming an assessor? If so, how and by whom this assessment will take place?
- Will assessors be financially compensated for their work? If so, how much will they receive? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of assessors, and the activities they provide? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 6.5: Initial assessor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an initial assessor training programme?
- What will be the goal of the initial assessor training?
- How is the initial assessor training being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the initial assessor training? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the initial assessor training programme be offered?
- For assessors, is the initial assessor training attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the initial assessor training programme be organized?
- What will be the costs of the initial assessor training programme? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure be in place regarding the quality of the initial assessor training programme? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Sub-block 6.6: Ongoing assessor training



Main questions to be raised:

- Will there be an ongoing assessor training programme / activities?
- What will be the goal of the ongoing assessor training / activities?
- How are the ongoing assessor activities being provided? Face to face? Blended learning? Online? Intervision? Supervision? One session? Multiple sessions? Etc.
- What are the contents of the ongoing assessor training activities? What is the pedagogical concept?
- How often will the ongoing assessor training activities be offered?
- For assessors, are the ongoing assessor training activities attended on a voluntary basis or is it mandatory?
- How and by whom will the ongoing assessor training activities be organized?
- What will be the costs of the ongoing assessor training activities to be organized? Who will pay for it?
- Will there be a quality assurance procedure in place regarding the quality of the ongoing assessor training programme / activities? If so, how does this procedure look like?

Building block 7: Designing the organizational process



Main questions to be raised:

- How will the certification process be organized within the organization?
- What will be the accompanying organizational design?
- What will be the accompanying roles and responsibilities?
- How will the quality of the organizational aspects of the certification process be assured?
- Will there be a transitional arrangement for holders of an existing quality mark, if any?

Sub-block 7.1: Organizational positioning



Main questions to be raised:

- Will the certification process be organized inside or outside the organization, or both?
- Will the certification process be accredited itself, for example by getting ISO 17004-accreditation?
- Will the certification process be monitored and/or audited on a regular basis by an external auditing organization?
- Will the certification process be monitored and/or audited on a regular basis by the organization itself?

Sub-block 7.2: Organizational design



Main questions to be raised:

- How does the certification process being designed and structured within the organization look like? How are the links with other organizations involved in the certification process be structured and designed?
- What are the processes to be developed to make sure the certification process is being executed effectively and efficiently? What do they look like?
- What are the different organizational roles to be defined with respect to the certification process? How will they relate to each other?
- What are the tasks, responsibilities and authorizations of each roles?
- How does the accountability structure with respect to the people and (internal and external) bodies involved in the certification process look like? What checks and balances have to be put in place? How is this documented?

Sub-block 7.3: Assuring the quality of the organizational aspects



Main questions to be raised:

- Which regulations have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the organizational aspects of the certification process? What will they look like?
- Which procedures have to be developed with respect to assuring the quality of the organizational aspects of the certification process? What will they look like?
- What kind of surveillance system has to be developed in order to monitor the quality of the organizational aspects of the certification process?
- What are the possibilities of enforcement when the quality of the organizational aspects of the certification process is not being met? What does the accompanying procedure look like? Who will have the authority to decide on enforcement measures?
- What assurance is in place that there is a continuous focus on improving the quality of the testing aspects of the re-certification process? Who is responsible for this process?

Sub-block 7.4: Transitional arrangements



Main questions to be raised:

- Does the new quality mark replace any existing quality marks?
- If so, will there be a transitional arrangement for holders of the existing quality mark?
- What arrangements have to be made regarding the legal settlements of existing quality marks?
For example, should any existing trademark rights be transferred?
- What arrangements have to be made regarding the organizational settlements of existing quality marks?
For example, should any existing legal entities be liquidated?
- What arrangements have to be made regarding the settlements of the rights and duties of the holders of the existing quality mark?
For example, will there be a transitional arrangement for holders of the existing quality mark in obtaining the new quality mark? For example by means of a general exemption with respect to proving some or all of the new assessment criteria, or by providing the new quality mark to all holders of the existing quality mark.
- In what way will the quality of any eventual transitional arrangements be assured?
- How will all the relevant stakeholders be informed about any eventual transitional arrangement?

Appendix 1: Certification Development Framework

