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6. Increasing the focus on quality assurance

Introductory note

The challenging phenomena that are currently effecting our European communities' especially our nation state are; aging population, early school leavers, single parents and carers at home caring for family members and not engaged in learning for the future and not allowed to participate to improve their financial state. These are the areas that motivate my suggestions.

These system and social issues might need closer attention. We hold the moral responsibility to engage or re engage and support these clients with methods, principles to promote change and productivity by addressing these issues through the Q.A. context.

Through my daily professional experiences the main challenges that block solutions for the above issues seem to be "How can one assess and validate ones skills and knowledge learnt through informal learning" and "The monopoly and different agendas of the educational establishments."

All issues above affect most communities, though the approach of providing solutions, checks, and balances might be varied due to the varied cultural influences. All issues have an economical consequence in all countries and if resolved could be seen as a positive solution to address skills shortages and provide economic advantages for the individual and country. We face the need to establish intrinsic methods to assess informal learning of skills, recognise prior learning for all levels and re assess the teaching methods to meet these specific client's needs .

The basic principles and guidelines require a strong European backing with a country –village - individual specific methodology for implementation, bringing this issue right in our laps requiring a Q.A. driven leadership.

As Malta we have an excellent geographical opportunity to test new methods due to our small size and dense volume of population, enabling us to monitor more efficiently than the larger countries. We can be the leaders in this field.

6. Increasing the focus on quality assurance

In order to enable learners to assemble their tailor-made learning pathways by selecting learning opportunities from different sub-systems and forms of delivery, it is necessary to develop a common understanding of qualities across countries and different education sub – systems.

a. *Is it possible to identify some common basic principles and guidelines of quality assurance valid across sectors and applicable to all qualifications?*

Yes: The core principals and guidelines that champion equality can provide an environment conducive to learning and remove identified barriers to education, making education a tool that works for us against poverty, provide opportunity to all levels of the communities and principals that promote further learning as a tool to educate the disadvantaged and marginalised sectors of the community.

b. *Should there be a core of common European quality assurance principles for the provision of learning opportunities in all sectors of education and training?*

Yes: The quality assurance principals for the provision of learning opportunities in all sectors of education and training can be an excellent opportunity to guide the education communities to promote equality and opportunity to all and remove educational monopolies that disable the learning process, so we become creative and innovative in our approach to cater for all.

c. *In your opinion, to which extent are existing quality assurance principles and credit systems suitable to support new forms of learning, such as digital learning (e.g. Massive Open Online Courses, MOOCs)?*

Currently resources that finance quality assurance principals and create credit systems are focused on methods that support the already advantaged and do not relate to the real world. Current assessment methods do not consider the importance and differences between theory and real live abilities i.e. in turning theory into practice during the education period. E.g. of students reaching a mature age after finishing the highest levels of education and cannot be productive due to having theory based education and have to spend more time to gain proficiency in the work skills.

We are missing an opportunity of “catching the two proverbial birds with one stone” during this long education period. We seem as a government to be motivated to keep the status quo!

I also believe that there could be 2 types of credit; those for theory based study and those for real live work experience with assessment methods and certification that recognise both the practical based skills and knowledge gained by formal and informal learning.

I am aware that we are moving slowly towards this goal, though resources might need to be focused and intensified to meet the persistent, “not going to go away” challenges of aging population, early school leavers, single parents and carers (on carers allowance) at home in Malta caring for family members, a part of our community that is desperate for our educational and training support.