

# **CAF and education, a tool for self-assessment and preparation of National Quality Agency evaluation**

**Christine DEFOIN**

## **1. Background**

In the FCWB (French-speaking Community Wallonia Brussels of Belgium) the law of 14 November 2002 created the Agency for Higher Education Quality Evaluation. In French, it is called AEQES (Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité dans l'Enseignement Supérieur)<sup>1</sup>. By that statutory law, all Schools for Higher Education in the FCWB has had, from then on, to develop quality approach and to implement self-evaluation towards continuous improvement.

However, each School has the opportunity to think about its own methodology and is free to choose the quality system that seems best adapted to its needs and requirements. The approach can thus imply the whole institution for Higher Education or only apply to specific types of training (called "entités" in French) indicated by the AEQES as to be audited in the near future.

An "entité" assessed by the AEQES has to set up a group called "Internal Assessment Commission" in charge to assess the "entité" and to write the self assessment report that will be submitted to a panel of external experts. This report is structured in 6 mega chapters<sup>2</sup> as decided by the statutory law of the FCWB of 11 April 2008 listing references of indicators.

Chapter 1: Institutional framework and Leadership

Chapter 2: Structures and Objectives of the program(s) assessed

Chapter 3: The beneficiaries of this (these) study program(s)

Chapter 4: Resources available (Human, financial and facility resources).

Chapter 5: External relations

Chapter 6: Analysis and strategic actions plan (Swot approach)

The chapters include 57 sub-chapters aiming to cover the whole teaching, educational and managing process in the « entité » assessed and doing so as accurately as possible.

However, it was frequently noted that among institutions without previously installed systemic quality approach the members of the Internal Assessment Commission are overwhelmed with the hugeness of the task. They feel a total lack of information, they feel powerless, resourceless, and they don't know how to tackle the auto-evaluation process.

Still, diagnosing before starting the AEQES imposed auto-evaluation would enable to structure the reflection and prepare the Commission's work accurately, not only for the evaluation of one and only « entité » - as a one-shot -, but also for all the « entités » to come and even for the global management of the institution.

And we believe CAF and Education to be undoubtedly one of the most efficient diagnosing tools to do so.

## **2. What is CAF and Education?**

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<sup>1</sup> website : <http://www.aeqes.be>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.aeqes.be/references\\_pages.cfm?references\\_pages\\_id=18](http://www.aeqes.be/references_pages.cfm?references_pages_id=18)

*“The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a total quality management tool inspired by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the model of the German University of Administrative Sciences in Speyer. It is based on the premise that excellent results in organisational performance, citizens/customers, people and society are achieved through leadership driving strategy and planning, people, partnerships and resources and processes. It looks at the organisation from different angles at the same time; the holistic approach of organisation performance analysis.*

*The CAF is a result of cooperation among the EU Ministers responsible for Public Administration. It is jointly developed under the aegis of the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), a working group of national experts set up by the Directors-General (DG) in order to promote exchanges and cooperation concerning innovative ways of modernising government and public service delivery in EU Member States”<sup>1</sup>.*

CAF is *“offered as an easy-to-use tool to assist public sector organisations across Europe to use quality management techniques in order to improve performance. The CAF provides a self-assessment framework that is specially conceived for public sector organisations, taking into account their differences.”<sup>2</sup>*

Between 2000 and 2010, around 2000 European public administrations used CAF to improve their organisations. There is also a lot of interest in using the tool from outside Europe, e.g. from Tunisia, China, the Middle East, the Dominican Republic and Brazil. The model is now translated in 20 languages. A CAF Resource Centre was created at the EIPA (European Institute of Public Administration)<sup>3</sup> in Maastricht following the decision of the DGs in charge of public service.

But it appears that CAF for public administrations was not really adapted to teaching and generated some problems: concepts, vocabulary or examples not really adapted to the education world. A group of authors coming from FCWB wrote a CAF and education version (CAF éducation et formation, in French) and tried to develop a European tool that may be used by all teaching levels (by primary school as well as by universities). The group was chaired by the CAF Belgian National Correspondent. In 2008 the person in charge of education for the FCWB decided to publish it and to suggest to all the schools of the Community to use it.

From January 2009, a European group worked to prepare the official version of CAF and Education (based on the French-speaking Community Wallonia Brussels of Belgium version) This version is now available on the EIPA website<sup>4</sup>.

### **3. How does the CAF and education system works**

CAF and education is based on exactly the same model as CAF for administrations:

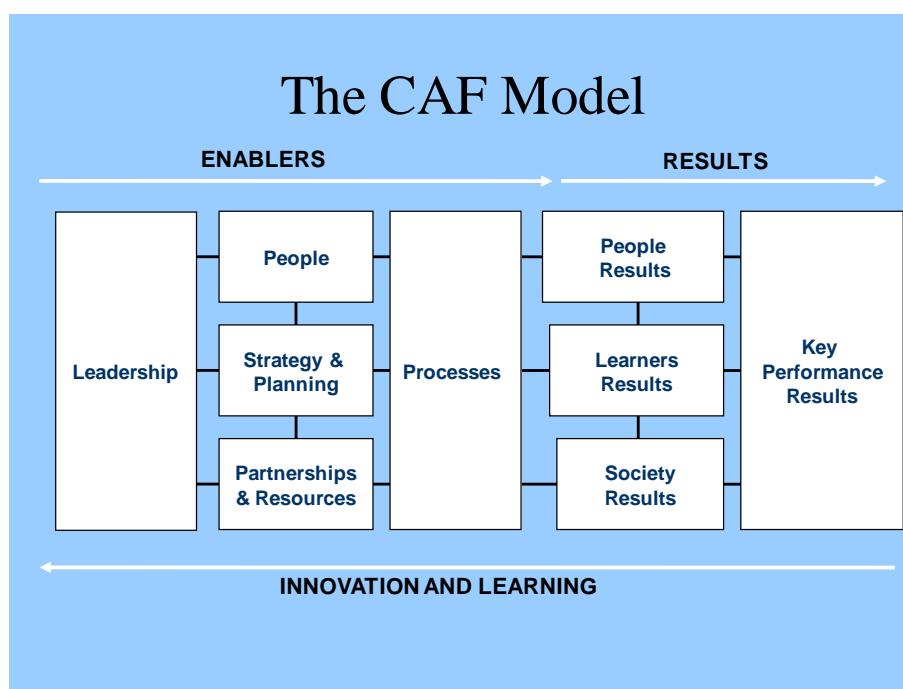
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<sup>1</sup> CAF and Education, General Introduction, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> EIPA : **European Institute of Public Administration**, leading centre of European learning and development for the public sector, with its headquarters in Maastricht, CAF resources center.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eipa.eu>



**Fig. 1: The CAF Model**

"The nine-box structure identifies the main aspects requiring consideration in any organisational analysis. Criteria 1-5 deal with the **Enabler** features of an institution. These determine what the institution does and how it approaches its tasks to achieve the desired results. In criteria 6-9, **results** achieved in the fields of learners, people, society and key performance are measured by perception measurements and internal indicators are evaluated. Each criterion is further broken down into a list of sub-criteria. The **28 sub-criteria** identify the main issues that need to be considered when assessing an organisation. They are illustrated by examples that explain the content of the sub-criteria in more detail and suggest possible areas to address, in order to explore how the administration answers the requirements expressed in the sub-criterion."<sup>1</sup>

- The first important thing is that CAF and education stays in the hands of people of the education and training institution: a representative group of members from all sectors of the institution will be in charge of the CAF and education analysis. It is self-assessment.
- Anyway, the initiative to start a quality approach using CAF and education must be based on a clear decision from Leadership consulting all people in the institution and giving free access to all the data of the institution.
- The Leadership first has to decide to apply the CAF self-assessment and then to organize and carry out the "communication plan" in order to inform people and stakeholders about the CAF and education analysis development in the institution.
- CAF and education can be used under a wide range of circumstances (to initiate a quality approach, to improve existing processes, and so on). The fact that it is "learners" oriented corresponds to the wishes of the Education and Training sector. (See Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, April 2009 « *Student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners* »).

<sup>1</sup> Caf and Education, General introduction, 2010

- CAF and education analysis will provide the institution with a tool enabling to “x-ray” its situation at a given moment, aiming to look into its total working and to spot areas for improvement, thanks to “self-assessment”. Only through facts and evidences.
- CAF and education will help the institution to enter in a Plan Do Check Act process thanks to the scoring system, one of the few compulsory elements of CAF. The scoring will make the institution able to identify the good practices as well as the weak areas in the internal organisation.
- After a CAF and education analysis, the institution will have to “priorize” the most urgent actions to realize. (And start the realization!)
- Then, the institution will be able to choose the adapted global quality management tool (for example, the balanced scorecard or even more complex systems like Iso...).
- Dedicating 6 to 8 half days for the actual analysis seems necessary. But the complete process for a CAF and education, from deciding to apply it to realising the actions planned including phases of communication, analysis, writing of the self-assessment report, prioritisation, and so on , lasts 2 years. Then it is time to start a new CAF and education again!
- A database on CAF applications is available on EIPA website, allowing the integration of good practices in public administrations from all over Europe and maybe beyond. It gives the opportunity to all the CAF users’ organisations to compare themselves with others, to find good practice that may be helpful or even to propose their own good practice to the others. Till now there are very few models of good practices coming from the Education sector but if the numbers of CAF and education users grows... Even if bench learning is not a wide-spread state of mind in the Education sector yet.
- A CAF e-tool is available for the organisations using CAF after online registration at the CAF database. The EIPA website provides all the available information on the European level. It is useful for scoring, for example.
- An ECU (Efficient Caf Users) CAF Label to identify the “good” CAF users is now available.

In short, self-assessment according to CAF and education provides the education and training institution with a great opportunity of knowing itself better and of building up a quality wake.

#### **4. Cross functions between CAF and Education and National Quality agency audit**

As mentioned in the first paragraph, an “entité” assessed by the AEQES has to write a self assessment report structured in 6 mega chapters. If we compare those chapters briefly with the 9 CAF criteria it is rather obvious that they are very close.

<b>CAF and Education criteria</b>	<b>National Quality Agency indicators</b>
Criterion 1: Leadership	Chapter 1 : Institutional framework and leadership And some aspects of chapter 5
Criterion 2: Strategy and planning	Chapter 2 : Structures and Objectives of the program(s) assessed Chapter 6 Analysis and strategic actions plan (Swot approach)
Criterion 3 : People	Chapter 4 : Resources (Human, financial and facility resources) And some elements of chapter ??
Criterion 4: Partnerships and resources	Chapter 4 : Resources (Human, financial and facility resources)
Criterion 5: Processes	Chapter 2 : Structures and Objectives of the program(s) assessed
Criterion 6: Learners oriented results	Chapter 3 : the beneficiaries of the program(s) and some elements of chapter 5 External relations
Criterion 7: People results	Chapter 2 : Structures and Objectives of the program(s) assessed  Chapter 5 : External relations
Criterion 8: Society results	Chapter 5 : External relations
Criterion 9: Key performance results <sup>1</sup>	Chapter 3: The beneficiaries of the program(s) Chapter 6: Analysis and strategic actions plan (Swot approach)

**Fig. 2: comparative table CAF/AEQES chapters**

Upon reading this table, it requires only little imagination to see the interest for a teaching institution to « x-ray » its internal functioning through CAF and Education. Management means, training and educating processes, and, possibly, research, involvement of stakeholders and learners, positioning of the institution within its STEPE<sup>2</sup> environment, staff and learners satisfaction measures, achievement rate of key processes, those are only a few of the many data an institution can capitalise after this self-assessment. It is then very

<sup>1</sup> Key performance results can be divided into:

1. External results: the measures of the effectiveness of policies and services/products in terms of capacity to improve condition of direct beneficiaries: the achievement of key activities' goals (see criterion 5) in terms of outputs (services and products) and outcomes (results). The « product/output » of an education and training institution can be the learner graduating, and the « result/outcome » his/her socio-professional integration (effectiveness);

2. Internal results: the measures of the internal functioning of the institution: its management, improvement and financial performance (efficiency and economy). These measures are likely to be closely linked to policy and strategy (criterion 2), partnerships and resources (criterion 4) and processes (criterion 5).

In CAF and education, Criterion 9 : Key-performances results

<sup>2</sup> STEPE = social, technological, economic, political and environmental

simple indeed to « convert » those data and to exploit them for the evaluation of « entités » required by the National Quality Agency.

In addition, the tool is extremely useful when choosing improvement actions to implement, for it suggests a relatively objective « prioritising » system, which enables to balance the strategic importance of the action as well as its feasibility degree.

Finally, CAF provides the institution with a tool to evaluate its « entités » and with a holistic analysis model, but also with a strong frame to implement a cyclic self-assessment approach, as it works on a two-year basis with possible application for the ECU label.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of the CAF and education approach is obviously to create a learning school, that is to say a learning institution where everybody at each level continuously improves his/her capacity to produce results that really matter to him/her. *“To be outstanding these days, institutions must more than ever bank on their knowledge, check their environment and sharpen their watch (strategically, technologically and competitively speaking). They must thus adapt continuously in order to bring efficient solutions to complex and unheard of situations.”*<sup>1</sup>

Observing the institution with a CAF and education approach clearly leads to support and help the assessment required by the National Quality Agency and, as to what ultimately matters to us, to develop a real evaluation-oriented school culture, in view of continuous improvement and total openness.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://leblocnotes.ca/fr/node/681>, Bulletin n° 10, août 2000, article de fond

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### **Questions:**

Why is it interesting to improve CAF and education in a school for Higher Education or University before beginning the National Quality Agency self assessment process?  
What are the principal obstacles/ successes in implementing a CAF and education analysis?  
How does the CAF self assessment process support the National Quality agency assessment?  
What is the real price of a CAF and education analysis?

### **Abstract**

## **CAF and education, a tool for self-assessment and preparation of the National Quality Agency evaluation**

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CAF (Common Assessment Framework) is a total quality management tool for public administrations based on the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model. It looks into the organisation from different angles at the same time, it is a holistic approach of the performance. The administrative CAF was not really adapted to the needs of schools so that in 2008 a group of experts wrote a *CAF and education*. An official European version of CAF and education is now available as well as a label ECU (Efficient CAF users).

The objective of the approach by CAF and education is obviously to create a learning school and to develop a real school culture to self-evaluation and external evaluation. But the tool is also very efficient to prepare the self-assessment and to write the self-assessment report required by the National Quality Agency for quality.

**Keywords:** CAF, AEQES, education, quality in education, learning school, self-assessment, self-assessment report, PDCA, criterion, indicator