



Tool for
**Quality improvement in
environmental education**

Instruction manual



Stiftung
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Quality improvement in
environmental education

Text SUB and SILVIVA

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1. Introduction

The Swiss Foundation for Environmental Education (Stiftung Umweltbildung Schweiz SUB) and the SILVIVA Foundation have been involved with processes to enhance quality in environmental education for many years. The experience of both foundations has been pooled to create the two tools: this manual and the checklists.

Existing tools and sources were used to develop the checklist. This newly developed tool for quality improvement in environmental education is based largely on "Qualitätsentwicklungsinstrument für AnbieterInnen naturbezogener Umweltbildung" ("Quality development tool for providers of nature-based environmental education") by SILVIVA (2008), "Eckpfeilern einer zeitgemässen Umweltbildung" ("Principles of contemporary environmental education") by the Swiss Foundation for Environmental Education (2004) and the "Positionspapier der Fachkonferenz Umweltbildung" ("position paper by the Swiss Expert Group on Environmental Education", 2010).

Tool to enhance quality in environmental education

This tool to further quality, developed by SUB and SILVIVA, enables organisations and self-employed practitioners to take stock of their current situation and to define necessary actions and measures to be taken to improve the quality of their environmental education activities / services. The quality criteria presented here can be used easily and with relatively little effort by self-employed practitioners, small to medium sized organisations as well as environmental education departments in larger organisations. They support providers in the introduction and implementation of quality improvement processes and in this way enhance the quality of environmental education activities / services.

The quality improvement processes initiated by the use of this tool should:

- enable good environmental education resources / services to be offered by organisations and self-employed environmental educators.
- increase the transparency and willingness to learn within organisations.
- make use of the motivation and needs of environmental educators in order to establish quality awareness in the long term.
- support organisations to evaluate their quality themselves, without rigid externally imposed specifications, and to identify and use their own potential to continually improve at their own pace.
- be effective, efficient and action oriented and appeal to small organisations with limited resources.
- be externally transparent and induce noticeable development and improvements within the organisation and therefore within the entire environmental education sector.

2. Improving Quality in environmental education

Outdoor education and continuous professional development (CPD) are important educational areas which are vital for environmental education and education for sustainable development. These complement formal education in schools, universities and vocational education. Outdoor learning and educational programmes offer opportunities for genuine encounters, practical, experiential learning and for the training of skills for action. These are necessary for active participation in society in the context of sustainable development.

The number of providers and the diversity of services and activities in environmental education have increased greatly in the past decade. Quality development is therefore increasingly important in environmental education. Reasons for this are (see also Bodensee-Stiftung, 2006, p. 2; Wilhelm & Schäfli, 2009):

- Environmental education is an integral part of education and needs to find convincing answers to the quality discussions and assessments, similar to other educational activities.
- Environmental education is subject to social change and therefore needs to be questioned regularly with regard to its content and methods (Kyburz-Graber, 2000, p. 1).
- There is increasing pressure from government, politics and educational professionals on providers of environmental education to justify their work.
- There is increasing competition. Customers expect high quality services and good value for money. The continuous improvement of programmes and of the providers themselves is unavoidable.
- To guarantee the long-term success of activities in environmental education, the quality of the programmes needs to match the quality expectations of the customers and needs to ensure that learning goals can be met.

Tools for quality control and quality development help to effectively use staff resources and funds, to optimise operating procedures, to clarify the organisation's mission and profile and therefore to strengthen the organisation's identity. They also contribute to professional attitude, which focuses on future challenges and the needs of participants, partners and funding bodies (charities, public and private sector). Successful organisations know the interests and expectations of their customers (target groups, mandating/funding bodies). They know that customer demand ultimately decides whether their educational and advisory services become established and stay in demand. By improving their quality, organisations and providers contribute to the long term capacity of environmental education to reach its goals, to continuously improve and in this way become increasingly important in our society.

Quality improvement implies a change in perspective away from a mainly subject and teaching oriented education organisation towards an organisation which is learner/participant centred. The teacher centred, instructive paradigm of early forms of environmental education is transformed into learner-centred contemporary environmental education. The general move towards outcome-based education also needs permeate environmental education. Quality improvement in environmental education thus results in a broader horizon of environmental education providers so that it includes customers, society, finances, organisation, staff, marketing and communication. This leads to a new identity of the organisation:

- The organisation is customer orientated and outcome-based.
- Management is consistently focused on overall aims, including with regard to staff development.
- As a learning organisation, there is a commitment to continuous improvement.
- There is a commitment to transparency.

3. A serious environmental education provider offers high-quality environmental education

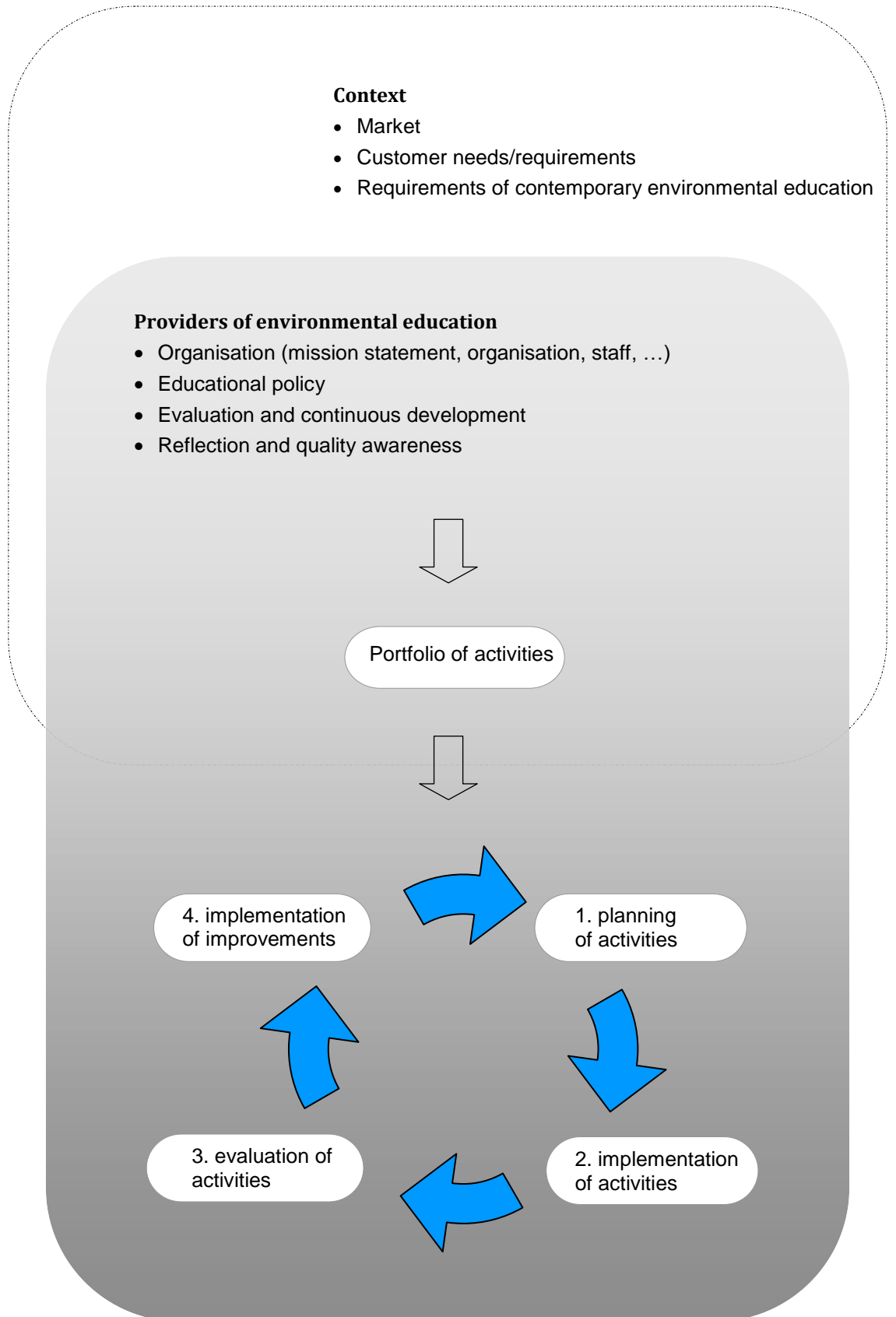
Quality improvement focusses on the educational activities and services, the organisational framework as well as the strategy and further development of the entire organisation. The quality of the educational activities and services and the quality of the organisation cannot be assessed independently.

A serious provider does everything possible in order to enable successful learning. This is, for example, shown in the choice and the continuous professional development of members of staff, in their dealings with partners, their resource management, their planning, their design and evaluation of environmental education activities and services. A high-quality environmental education provider also needs to be continually aware of its long-term survival in the marketplace (Netzwerk Umweltbildung Sachsen, 2007).

Quality improvement aspires to continual learning and improvement. A quality improvement process follows these fundamental steps (see also program «Transfer-21», 2007, p. 9):

- Determination of aims and a vision for the development of the organisation (mission statement).
- Evaluation of the current situation to show the current stage of development.
- Definition of concrete goals and criteria to monitor the attainment of aims and objectives.
- Definition of specific activities and measures with which the goals can be met. Definition of a precise time plan and of responsibilities.
- Implementation of planned activities.
- Review of the goals reached and appraisal of the new stage of development.

Quality improvement in environmental education:
(Figure adapted from eduqua-Handbuch 2004)



4. Structure of the tool to enhance quality in Environmental Education

Introduction

The tool consists of two main parts which will be described in more detail in the following sections:

- Part I "Providers of environmental education: improving quality"
- Part II "Requirements for a contemporary environmental education".

Part I of the checklist "Providers of environmental education: improving quality" addresses the whole organisation which provides the institutional framework for the environmental education activities. The quality areas "Organisations in environmental education", "Educational policy", "Portfolio of activities", "Assessment" and "Reflection and further development" are examined in this part.

Part II of the checklist "Requirements for a contemporary environmental education" examines the requirements for environmental education which contribute towards sustainable development. The quality areas of "planning of activities and objectives", "Choice and quality of content", "Didactics/methods", "Supporting materials", "Preparation and follow-up work", "Implementation" and "Evaluation" are looked at. This part of the checklist assists in the development and appraisal of an educational policy and the portfolio of activities and can be used for the examination and further improvement of individual activities or services.

These quality areas cover all the essential aspects for environmental organisations or self-employed practitioners who focus on high-quality activities in environmental education. The quality areas describe aspects which need to be examined during an assessment and encompass multiple indicators which describe the requirements of the relevant area as precisely as possible.

Part I: Providers of environmental education: improving quality

1. Organisations in environmental education

The organisation provides the framework for high-quality environmental education with its mission statement, its staff and its other resources. The rules and processes within the organisation are chosen in such a way, that they enable efficient and goal-oriented work. External communication as the organisations visiting card to address customers and surveying customer satisfaction are both recognised as important tools in quality improvement.

Quality areas

1. Information about the institution
2. Mission statement of the institution
3. Organisation within the team
4. Members of staff
5. The institution within environmental education networks
6. Funding
7. Customer satisfaction
8. Safety policy and emergency communication

2. Educational policy

Educational activities are guided by a written educational policy. The framework for the educational work and its reflection is defined in this document. Based on the mission statement, the educational policy describes the organisation's approach to education. The educational policy also describes the aims, target groups and the areas of activities of the organisation's environmental education activities.

Quality areas

1. Approach to education
2. Definition of educational aims
3. Topics, content and areas of activities
4. Infrastructure

3. Portfolio of activities

The organisation develops a portfolio of activities with a view to long term viability. It does this with reference to its mission statement, its educational policy as well as the social context and the interests and expectations of the stakeholders (target groups, funding bodies). How this portfolio of activities should develop over time is also clarified.

The activities and services are designed with the competencies and the capabilities of the providers in mind. This makes them unique and attractive.

Quality areas

1. Information about activities and services
2. Market orientation, needs assessment
3. Choice of participants/target groups
4. Overview of content
5. Yearly and quarterly planning

Assessment of activities and further development

The participants should take part in lifelong learning – and so should the educators and their organisations! Successful environmental education is characterised by a continuous and goal-oriented evaluation of the activities and permanent cycles of improvement based on this assessment. This can only be guaranteed if the relevant tools are in place.

Quality areas

1. Evaluation policy
2. Assessment of activities and services
3. Feedback / assessment of members of staff
4. Lessons learnt: Transfer to planning/further development

Reflection and quality awareness

The continual reflection of ones own work and the development of clear quality standards form the basis of a quality awareness which permeates the entire institution and all its activities.

Quality areas

1. Awareness of quality improvement

Part 2: Requirements for contemporary environmental education

Environmental education contributes to sustainable, future-proof development. It is underpinned by the concept of strong sustainability. Environmental education supports and enhances competencies (skills?) which allow the recognition and understanding of the finite nature of the natural resources fundamental to our existence. It also promotes the ability to see humans as part of a community acting with solidarity and responsibility towards nature, each other and other species. Environmental education enables a better understanding of ecological, social, economic, cultural and ethical interconnections and activities tools and methods which allow people to decide and act in a jointly responsible way.

The Swiss Expert Group on Environmental Education¹ stated their position on central aspects of formal, non-formal and informal environmental education in their "Positionspapier" ("Position paper"). This paper, along with "Didaktisches Konzept Umweltbildung" ("Didactical concept of environmental education", Sieber et al. 2004) and "Umweltbildungskompetenzen für eine Nachhaltige Entwicklung" ("Environmental education competencies (skills?) for sustainable development", SUB 2011) forms the basis for this part of the checklist.

This section of the checklist supports the creation and/or assessment of an educational policy and portfolio of activities. It also assists with the assessment of individual activities and services. Particular attention should be given to the compatibility of activities for schools with school curricula.

Quality areas

1. Planning of activities and objectives
2. Choice and quality of content
3. Didactics/methods
4. Supporting materials
5. Preparation and follow-up work
6. Implementation
7. Evaluation

¹ The Swiss Expert Group on Environmental Education includes members who are responsible for environmental education from educational institutions, federal states and organisations which are active either in the whole of Switzerland or in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

5. How to work with the tool

This tool (see table below) helps providers to formulate concrete measures in various quality areas. It should therefore be used yearly in order to evaluate the institution and its activities and services. It is best used as a self-assessment tool integrated into the normal yearly planning cycle.

I. Providers of environmental education: improving quality

Area	Indicator	relevant		rating				need for action		
		yes	no	++	+	-	--	high	mediu m	low
1. Organisations in environmental education										
1.1 Information about the institution										
<i>The information contains details about the following:</i>										
• Aims and areas of activities of the organisation.										
• Target groups.										
• Contact and responsibilities.										
• Terms and conditions.										
1.2 Mission statement of institution										
<i>The mission statement contains details about the following points:</i>										
• Mandate, services and activities										
• Organisational culture, values, guiding ideas.										
• Customer orientation.										
• Standards, aims, future perspectives.										
• Understanding of quality and quality goals.										

Self assessment

The tool allows, as a first step, to carry out an analysis of the current situation. The following points should be taken into account for all indicators (see the heading row of the table):

- relevance: not all criteria and indicators are important for every institution and every activity. Therefore the first step is to judge whether the indicator is relevant or not. The relevance can change over time, previously irrelevant criteria can become relevant and vice versa (for example with a shift in the areas of activities, the target group etc.)
- rating: assess how well an indicator is covered by the current state of the institution/activity
- need for action: an assessment is made of how great the need for action is. Not all indicators are equally important. The need for action indicator shows how necessary improvement in this area is.
- Comments/measures: concrete measures for improvement which result from the need for action can be noted in this field. These can be small, short-term measures or larger measures which need concentrated effort over the mid- or long-term. The aim of quality development is a continuous process of improvement (see the figure on page 13, section 3). Therefore measures for improvement taken since the last assessment should be integrated into the self-evaluation, insofar as results from these measures should be evaluated and further developed.

This tool can and should be adapted to your own needs. The checklists show what an environmental education organisation/environmental educator should focus on with regard to quality improvement. However, not all criteria and indicators are equally relevant for all providers and activities and services. It is important for the provider to decide themselves, which criteria are important and which ones are not.

Formulation of implementation projects in the area of quality improvement

Projects to implement quality improvements should be formulated yearly on the basis of the self-evaluation and should then be incorporated into the yearly planning of the organisation. These can be assessed in the next quality evaluation of the institution. This step ensures that the measures are implemented and that the quality of the organisation is constantly improved.

6. Further reading relating to specific quality areas (german)

title	Author, publisher, year	link (12.12.2011)
Educational policy Rahmenbildungskonzept Naturpärke und Naturschutzzentren	BAFU 2012	in Erarbeitung
Portfolio activities Unternehmen Umweltbildung	stratum 2006	www.oekom.de/buecher/themen/bildungskommunikation/archiv/buch/unternehmen-umweltbildung.html
Arbeitshilfe Qualitätsmanagementsystem Umweltbildung	Netzwerk Umweltbildung Sachsen 2007	www.umweltbildung-sachsen.de/bilder/arbeitshilfe7.pdf
Evaluation and quality improvement Qualitätsprozesse in der Umweltbildung	SUB 2009	www.umweltbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/2_Qualitaetsprozesse.pdf
Entwicklung von Umweltbildung in Pärken von nationaler Bedeutung	SILVIVA 2009	www.bafu.admin.ch/dokumentation/umwelt/11155/11186/index.html
Requirements for contemporary environmental education Position Umweltbildung der Fachkonferenz Umweltbildung	2010	www.umweltbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/positionspapier_1.pdf
Umweltbildungskompetenzen für eine Nachhaltige Entwicklung	SUB 2011	www.umweltbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/Umweltbildungskompetenzen_fuer_eine_Nachhaltige_Entwicklung.pdf
Bildung für Nachhaltige Entwicklung, Definition SUB/SBE	SUB/SBE 2010	www.bne-forum.ch/download/DefEDD_FED-FEE-DEF_Deutsch.pdf
Didaktisches Konzept Umweltbildung	Sieber et al. 2001/2004	www.umweltbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/Didaktisches_Konzept_UB.pdf
Umweltbildung für die Schule	SUB 2012	www.umweltbildung.ch
Kriterien zu Medien zur Umweltbildung (Unterrichtshilfen, CD- Rom, Lernsoftware, Medienpakete):	SUB 2010	www.umweltbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/Kriterienkataloge-zur-Medienevaluation.pdf
General Informationen zu Grundlagen der Umweltbildung		www.umweltbildung.ch
Informationen zur naturbezogenen Umweltbildung		www.silviva.ch

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