



Quality Assurance for HEIs' Continuing Education Programmes

Progress

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The project QACEP rationale lies on the evidence that Higher Education Institutions are key actors in lifelong learning promotion and they are now called to implement their efforts in providing research-based higher education for lifelong learners and in guaranteeing the quality of their learning offer.

A response HEIs actually give to social challenges in terms of lifelong learning need is the increasing and diversified provision of advanced Continuing Education, at the intersection between HEIs, professional practice and general vocational education and training: granting transparency and external accountability and assessing the quality of the mentioned programmes as well as for higher education mainstream courses are two challenging commitments for HEIs, coherent with the priorities for the enhancement of the EHEA.

During the two years of the project's life, QACEP project aims to address the need for creating and sharing specific tools in this field. The Consortium aims to develop a general framework for the Quality Assurance of Continuing Education Programmes offered by HEIs, compatible and adapted to the needs and special features of each individual HEI, and to elaborate concrete and practical tools for the quality assessment of these programmes.

To reach the envisaged outcomes, project activities have been organised in three stages:

1. **comparative analysis** within the partner HEIs with regard to the specific context in which continuing education programmes are offered and to their main characteristics and challenges, and with regard to QA in this field (*Nov. 2009 – June 2010*);
2. **design of the overall framework for QA of CEPs** on the basis of the analysis report and by sharing and analysing the selected good practices (*May 2010 – Nov. 2010*);
3. **“pilot evaluation”** of a group of continuing education programmes within the partner HEIs, using the overall framework and specific tools to examine operational and organisational aspects and the feasibility of the framework (*Oct. 2010 – June. 2011*).

The Consortium carrying out the project is composed of eight institutions: six HEIs with a broad experience in the field of QA and in Continuing Education (CE) Programmes, and two associations representing a large number of other HEIs. Partners are different in size and internal organisation and they are representative of different geographical areas and social and economic environments. This composition allows to compare different perspectives of CE in European HEIs and different approaches to QA.

During the first year, the Consortium applied mainly a bottom up methodology in order to collect, to compare and discuss the partners' concrete experiences, challenges and approaches towards Quality Assurance and Continuing education programmes. The results of the analysis stage (available in the **“QACEP Comparative analysis report”**, public document downloadable from the project website) are the main basis for the design of QACEP framework and, at the same time, they contribute to foster a mutual understanding of contexts, practices and challenges at a European level.

During the second year of the project, in carrying out the pilot evaluation the Consortium will apply an experimental approach testing the use of tools and methodologies in line with the **overall QA framework for Continuing Education Programmes**.

The developed outcomes, **QACEP Framework** and the **Pilot evaluation tools** (an evaluation report model, and a questionnaire model) will be available on the project web site (www.qacep.eu) by the end of the project to be shared with different stakeholders. In order to exploit the use of the products developed and validated, a **short Manual** will be published and made available on the website and an **European Seminar** will be organized at the end of the Project (*September 2011*).

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1. Project Objectives

The main objectives of QACEP project are **to develop a general framework for the Quality Assurance of Continuing Education Programmes offered by HEIs, compatible and adapted to the needs and special features of each HEI, and to elaborate concrete and practical tools for the quality assessment of these programmes.** The outputs of the project aim to give a concrete contribution to HEIs offering continuing education programmes, to support them in the process to become lifelong learning centres and in the actions apt to guarantee the quality of advanced Continuing Education.

The rationale of the project first lies in the evidence that Higher Education Institutions are fundamental actors in lifelong learning promotion and for this reason they are now called to reinforce their efforts in providing research-based higher education for lifelong learners and in guaranteeing the quality of all their learning offer.

Context - Advanced knowledge-based societies require innovative and creative educational systems that are able to answer immediately to specific needs of the continuously evolving and changing labour market and of society in general: appropriate training of adults is required in order to prevent forms of generational discrimination within employment policies and societal life; even well specialized and graduate professionals are called to improve and update personal skills and capacities. HEIs must define wider and articulated strategies for lifelong learning, for example by experimenting specific tools and paths in degree courses (1st, 2nd, 3rd cycle) to grant recognition procedure and guidance activities for a diversified student population and adapting study programmes in a lifelong perspective. But, in the last few years, **different surveys, like EUA's "Trends" reports and BeFlex project, have analyzed learning practices in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and have given evidence that one response HEIs actually give to social, cultural and economic challenges, in terms of lifelong learning need, is the provision of continuing education and training programmes,** mainly addressed to post graduate but also to secondary students with professional experience.

Needs / constraints - Attention to this topic is crucial because Continuing Education "market", offered by HEIs and other educational institutions, is increasing and furthermore HEIs have the responsibility to grant transparency. **The growing relevance of this offer arises the need to include HEIs' CEPs in the existing quality assurance systems and to develop appropriate approaches in order to improve the quality of these programmes.**

The project starting point is to consider that **an adapted approach for the quality assurance of CEPs is crucial due to the specific objectives of these programmes.** Advanced continuing education offered by HEIs are characterised by features which in some cases differ substantially from the programmes offered in the field of initial training: they cannot build upon a long tradition of educational and training contents in HEIs; there is a great variety in terms of where continuing education programmes fit within the structure of the HEIs; there is a great variety in terms of duration, learner target groups, organisation; they are characterised by a large degree of flexibility; they must give immediate response to specific needs of the labour market; there is often a lack of consolidated rules, national regulations or guidelines for this kind of programmes.

In developing the framework and tools for quality assessment the Consortium will take into account all these special features and the diversity in the character of European Higher education: in this way **the tools to be developed will be compatible with and could be adapted to the needs of each individual Higher Education Institution in terms of local and regional idiosyncrasies, special core programme areas, national structural standards and policy decisions.**

2. Project Approach

To reach the envisaged results and to provide outputs for HEIs, QACEP project activities have been organised in three stages:

4. **comparative analysis** within the partner universities with regard to the specific context in which continuing education programmes are offered and to their main characteristics and challenges, and with regard to QA in the field of, and/or relevant to, continuing education programmes (*November 2009 – June 2010*);
5. **design of the overall framework for QA of CEPs** on the basis of the main findings of the analysis report (*April 2010 - conclusion by the end of 2010*);
6. **“pilot evaluation”** of a group of continuing education programmes within the partner HEIs, using the overall framework and specific tools to examine operational and organisational aspects and the feasibility of the framework (*the pilot stage will take place in the 2nd year of the project, from October 2010 to June 2011*).

During the first year, the Consortium applied mainly a bottom up methodology in order to collect, to compare and to discuss partners concrete experiences, challenges and approaches towards Quality Assurance and Continuing education programmes.

The overall organisation and work methodologies developed consist in:

- definition by each **partner** of a **project team** composed by staff members of Quality Assurance Units and/or Continuing Education coordination Units and academic staff with responsibilities in Quality Assurance or Continuing Education policies (Partners appointed their member in the Core Group of the project);
- **Core Group Workshops** (involving the project partner teams members), organised in small working groups and presentations by all Partners in order to allow full participation in developing contents;
- **Core Group distance work**, facilitated through monthly virtual meetings and a continuous exchange of feedbacks by email, in order to collect Partner experiences and contents and in order to allow the full preparation, and consequently the full participation, of the members during the Workshops.

For each project stage, then, specific approaches have been identified.

1 - Comparative analysis

The analysis was based on the pre-studies turned in by the six HEIs that are member of the Consortium. The first step was the design of a **template** that included concrete questions on the topics to be addressed (*the template was discussed during a Core Group Workshops, Leuven 15th of December 2009*). Partners have been asked to carry out the pre-studies on the basis of the common template.

Using the template had different advantages: it guaranteed that the information provided by the different universities touched the topics that were essential with regard to the scope of the analysis. Secondly it resulted in a set of information that was mutually comparable.

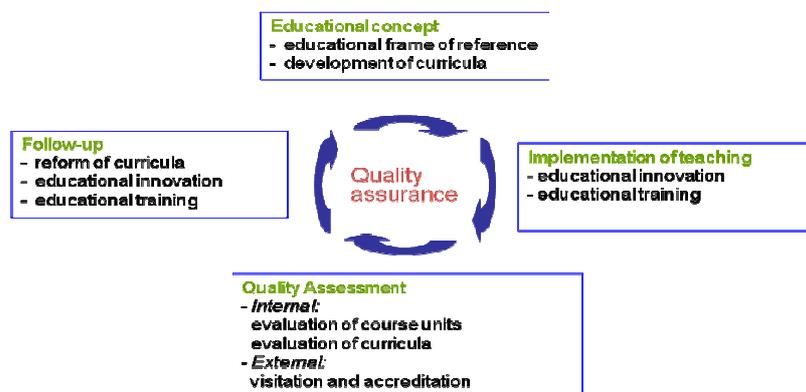
The questions were structured according to six parts:

- 1) *General description of the university/institute (General questions which need to give an idea of the educational national and institutional context as well as the quality assurance context)*
- 2) *Identification of continuing education within the partner university (What is its importance role and place and how is it concretely implemented)*

- 3) Identification of planning and set-up procedures for Continuing Education programmes
- 4) Identification of quality assessment procedures for Continuing Education programmes
- 5) SWOT analysis of Quality Assurance (QA) of Continuing Education programmes
- 6) Good practices of QA (of Continuing Education programmes or other programmes).

The structure of the template reflects the **holistic approach to Quality Assurance** applied by the Consortium in the project, considering QA of programmes to be a continuous process (quality cycle) containing the following four stages:

Plan (planning and design of the programme)
 Do (implementation and delivery of teaching)
 Check (quality assessment)
 Act (follow-up)



In this way attention was paid to the phase in which CEPs are designed (plan), in which they are implemented (do), in which the monitoring and evaluation of CEP's takes place (check) and actions are taken in order to improve programmes (act). The plan phase corresponds to part 3 of the prestudies and refers to the period before the programme is running (= ex-ante). The check and act phases are included in part 4 of the prestudies and refer both to the process once the programme is running (= in itinere), as well as to the period once the programme has ended (= ex-post). On the basis of follow-up activities, new plans can be made in order to improve the programme.

The pre-studies were analyzed by one partner. The first results of the comparative analysis have been discussed during a Core Group Workshop (*Barcelona, 28-29 of March 2010*) in which all partners took part.

The comparative analysis focused on common characteristics and relevant differences among the institutions with regard to QA of CE programmes (individual institutions were mentioned if relevant) and good practices regarding the approaches, working methodologies and concrete tools already in use in QA of CE programmes in partner institutions. Based on the first analysis, the feedback and discussion within the workshop, a report was written and submitted to all partners for further a check before it was finished (*June 2010*).

2 – Design of the framework

In designing the QA framework, the Consortium made reference, first of all, to the results of the analysis stage. In addition to that, suggested references to complementary work done in this field in other projects have been considered. This led to a useful confrontation and discussion on different approaches toward Quality Assurance.

The design of the framework, that will be finalised by the beginning of the second year of the project (*November 2010*), followed these steps:

1. brainstorming among three partners (virtual meetings and share of documents/drafts) and presentation of main principles behind the framework to all partners;
2. draft of a version of the framework and request to HEIs in the Consortium to fill in and test the framework, providing comments;
3. Consortium internal Seminar organised in partner presentation session and work groups discussion on the main components of the framework.

During the first **brainstorming stage** (step 1, *April – May 2010*) the discussion focused on how to translate the conclusions of the comparative analysis in the framework and on how to organise the contents in the framework in order to fit the envisaged objectives.

Step 2 (*June 2010*) was crucial for an effective success of the Consortium internal Seminar held in Bologna on the *29th and 30th of June 2010*: the main objective of the **preparatory step was to allow participants to develop their own contribution and to facilitate the discussion during the meeting**.

The Consortium internal **Seminar** (step 3) reflected the overall approach applied in the project. Main starting points were the concrete experience of each institution and staff involved and confrontation with European policies: **participation to the Seminar was extended not only to core group members but also to other staff members of partner universities involved in continuing education activities** (managers, coordinators, trainers/trainers responsible for planning and implementation of one or more continuing education programmes); and **two guest speakers representing EUA and EUCEN were invited**.

The same methodology, fine-tuning the final product by collecting feedbacks from partners on all the contents developed, will be applied in the next activities:

1. summary of all the inputs collected from partners in the 3 above mentioned steps;
2. draft of a new version of the framework to be further fine-tuned by partners through distance work (*September 2010*);
3. final discussion session during a Core Group Workshop (*Warsaw, 18-19 of Oct. 10*).

Furthermore **the Consortium will gather comments from national and European networks** while disseminating in a first stage the framework.

3 – Pilot Stage:

During the second year of the project, the Consortium will apply an experimental approach: a “pilot internal evaluation” of a group of continuing education programmes (selected in every partner HEI) will be conducted using tools and methodologies in line with the overall QA framework for Continuing Education developed in the first year, in order to verify its applicability.

The pilot stage intends to test a format to report upon the evaluation (self evaluation in specific) of continuing education programmes which should be applicable in different contexts and it will include a trail concerning survey methodologies based on stakeholders interviews aimed at collecting data on some characteristics and features of Continuing Education courses leavers (for example: opinions on actual accomplishment of the learning outcomes, acquired competences, current job conditions, overall satisfaction for the course).

Furthermore, thanks to a web platform the pilot stage will test the use of specific systems for data collection and information organization.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

During the **first year of the project**, the main outcomes and results achieved concern the comparative analysis and the design of the framework. They are briefly described in the paragraphs below:

1 - Analysis stage - achieved results

Together with the experience and the knowledge gained by the project's partners in the topics of the project, the first phase led to:

1. common understanding within the Consortium on:
 - a. what the partners mean by continuing education programmes and what are their characteristics;
 - b. quality assurance and quality assessment procedures for CEP in each institution;
 - c. main commonalities and main differences between the partner institutions.

➤ This result provided the necessary basis to design the framework.
2. **"QACEP Comparative analysis report"**, public document downloadable from the project website containing a synthesis of the main evidences.

The report main focus is on CE programmes, occasionally, however, the national or institutional level has been taken into account if relevant in order to understand differences between institutions or specific characteristics or approaches of individual institutions. The structure of the template used in pre-studies is more or less maintained in the report, containing the following 4 parts: *General description of the universities, Definition of CE programmes, Planning and design of CE programmes, Quality management and quality assessment procedures, including follow-up, of CE programmes, Good practices/characteristics*. The document describes the great variety of continuing education both in terms of type (what are to be considered as CEPs) and offer within the six Consortium HEIs. The document describes also the differences in the approach to the internal quality assurance of these programmes although also commonalities were detected, mainly at the level of underlying concept and principles.

- The report is a public document aiming at fostering a mutual understanding of contexts, practices and challenges at a European level. In order to further promote the dissemination of the analysis results, the Consortium produced a paper selected for the European Quality Assurance Forum to be held on the 18-20 Nov. 2010.
3. methodological suggestions for further studies/benchmarks on CEPs
 - at the end of the analysis stage, Partner highlighted the usefulness of pre-studies to map and describe characteristics and processes of their own CEPs and Quality Assurance systems: it suggested that the template used for the pre-studies analysis turned out to be a useful unintentionally resulted in an instrument that can also be used by for institutions outside the consortium to present a general state of the art with regard to its CEPs and the quality assurance system in place;
 - furthermore, the template contains a comparative "table" useful to describe characteristics of CEPs in different contexts and that might be used in the frame of wider future benchmarks or comparative studies aiming at identifying Continuing Education offer in the EHEA.

2 – Design of the framework - achieved results and expected outcomes

The design of the framework will be finalised by the end of *December 2010*.

During the activities carried out from April to August, the Consortium achieved the following intermediate results:

1. **evaluation of approaches on Quality Assurance within the Consortium** and further discussion on which characteristics of HEIs CEPs are the more relevant to be considered by a Quality Assurance system,
2. general agreement/convergence of partners visions on the main structure and on some main principles behind the tool that will be delivered by the Consortium:
 - a. QACEP Framework will be conceived as a reference tool for Higher Education Institutions to manage strategically the quality of its continuing education programmes, by fostering a continuous improvement cycle. The Framework developed by QACEP will be generic to guarantee its' usefulness for very different continuing education providers and it could be used by each individual institution to develop its own model
 - b. **according to the approach of the analysis stage, QACEP Framework will be built on the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle idea**. Therefore the framework will be organised in four parts, corresponding to the phases: Planning and design, Implementation and delivery, Programme monitoring, Programme improvement. For each phase the framework will identify key elements and aspects: at this stage Key elements are meant by the Consortium as the features of continuing education programmes that are crucial for a successful performance and so must be considered by a Quality Assurance System for continuing education programmes; "Aspects" are considered to be important factors for quality assurance of continuing education programmes
 - c. in order to facilitate the use by stakeholders, QACEP framework will provide an institutional evaluation tool which could be used by Higher Education Institutions to self-evaluate their processes maturity.

The Consortium is using results of the preparatory activities and the outcomes of Seminar work groups to fine-tune the list of key elements and aspects. The expected outcomes are: the QACEP Framework description, an institutional self-evaluation tool, a glossary and a further list of examples of organizational tools.

By the end of the project these tools will be downloadable from the website of the project.

The mentioned results will be further developed during the second year of the project: **the pilot stage of the project will provide other tools for the Quality Assurance of Continuing Education Programmes** and then, in the way to exploit the use of the products developed **a short Manual will be published** and made available to EHEA community.

For what concerns dissemination, during the first year the consortium reached the main following results:

- **project web site** containing description of project objectives and partners, ready to become a main tool for the dissemination of future products of the project together with promotional materials;

- presentation of the project to two associations identified as crucial for further dissemination (**EUA and EUCEN**) and involvement of two representatives in the Consortium internal Seminar held in Bologna;
- Selection of a paper on QACEP first results for the **European Quality Assurance Forum** to be held on on the *18-20 Nov. 2010*;
- presentation of the project to two Task Forces of the Coimbra Group (a task force will be involved also in evaluating the public products of the project);
- presentation of project objectives mainly to partner internal members but also to other stakeholders (for example during the national conference "Innovation skills in Lifelong learning, held in Bologna at the Fondazione Alma Mater).

During the second year of the project, the Consortium will intensify dissemination activities thanks to the provision of the project web site and thanks to the contacts already established with important stakeholders.

4. Partnerships

The Consortium is composed of eight institutions - five HEIs and a Foundation attached to a University with a broad experience in the field of QA and in Continuing Education Programmes, and two associations representing a large number of other HEIs. Partners are representative of different geographical areas and social and economic environments. Most of them are actively involved in European networks working in the field of Lifelong Learning (for example EUCEN) and Quality Assurance and/or participate in other European Projects: therefore it is possible to conceive cross-project cooperation and the exploitation of results of other project in the development of QACEP activities.

➤ **University of Bologna - IT (Coordinator)**

The University of Bologna is one of the most important institutions of higher education across Europe with more than 80.000 enrolled students, 23 faculties, 69 departments, 3200 academics. UNIBO has adopted a Multicampus structure and is today the most internationalised of all the Italian universities. UNIBO offers more than 200 degree courses (bachelor and master), phd course and postgraduate vocational training courses: continuing, permanent education courses which offer the opportunity of obtaining a qualification certifying the competencies acquired, and the official recognition of university credits. To promote Quality Assurance of learning programmes according to European standards and guidelines is one of the strategic priorities of UNIBO.

➤ **Aalto University, School of Science and Technology, Lifelong Learning Institute Dipoli - FI**

The Aalto University, established 2010, is created from the merger of three Finnish universities: The Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki University of Technology and The University of Art and Design Helsinki. The three schools of the Aalto University - the School of Economics, the School of Art and Design and the School of Science and Technology are all leading and renowned institutions in their respective fields and in their own right. The school of Science and Technology has four faculties with numerous degree programmes. Lifelong Learning Institute Dipoli TKK Dipoli operates as a separate unit as of the School of Science and Technology. TKK Dipoli acts in the forefront of technological development, offering a wide range of continuing education programmes and development services for companies, public bodies and individuals. TKK Dipoli is also a major contributor to internationally recognized learning and research programmes.

➤ **Inter-University Consortium Alma Laurea – IT**

AlmaLaurea Inter-university Consortium (AL), was born at the University of Bologna and in 16 years of activity became a highly qualified component of the entire Italian university system. AL was set up to be at the service of graduates, universities and companies. AlmaLaurea's uniqueness (60 universities, with 1.370.000 curricula vitae stored in a databank, March 2010) lies in having created an integrated system able to guarantee documentation completeness (universities make available information on their entire student body), periodic (the surveys are taken at regular intervals), well-timed (year after year, a 'snapshot' of the universities' internal and external performances may be obtained) and bring it up to date (curricula vitae are updated with the graduates' professional data). AL aims at monitoring the quality of the educational processes of graduates as well as their occupational conditions and at facilitating the matching of demand and supply of qualified labour.

➤ **Coimbra Group**

Founded in 1985 and formally constituted by Charter in 1987, the Coimbra Group is an association of long-established European multidisciplinary universities of high

international standard committed to creating special academic and cultural ties in order to promote, for the benefit of its members, internationalisation, academic collaboration, excellence in learning and research, and service to society. The Coimbra Group was among the earliest associations to develop fully-fledged Erasmus Programme activities, and has decades of experience in the exchange of researchers, teachers and students.

➤ **Katholieke Universiteit Leuven – BE**

The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven is the largest university in Flanders, and one of the oldest in Europe. It will be represented in this project by 2 different departments: it's educational policy unit responsible for quality assurance of postgraduate programmes, and the AVNet department, which hosts the lifelong learning unit of the university. The Office for Educational Policy supports the academic authorities of the K.U. Leuven in designing and implementing its educational policy. The department is active in the field of quality assurance, curriculum development, educational innovation, institutional research, legal advice and regulations. AVNet supports in an integrated and interdisciplinary way education at the university, with focus on media, technological, pedagogical and organisational aspects, and in particular for networked e-learning and distance education in an international context. AVNet also hosts the Lifelong Learning unit and the studycentre of the Open University

➤ **Institute for Life Lifelong Learning of the University of Barcelona – ES**

IL3-UB is a Foundation that the University of Barcelona (associated partner in this project) has created to promote an education attractive to students during all stages in life. In IL3-UB two initiatives of the own University of Barcelona have been integrated: Les Heures (centre for face-to-face training) and the University of Barcelona Virtual. Currently IL3-UB has more than 25.000 students and more than 600 training programmes within Masters, Postgraduate programs and courses of specialisation and extension. IL3 projects combine different actions: analysis and definition of competences; analysis of the training needs; development and implementation of experimental educational approaches; teacher training. IL3-UB shares with the University of Barcelona a solid base of research and qualified teachers. From this base, scientific findings and the knowledge accumulated through professional experience can be easily transferred to the students.

➤ **University College of Cork – IE**

University College Cork is a collegiate university with a long tradition of excellence in research and teaching. The high quality education we provide, enriched by a distinctive college experience, is sustained by demand from highly qualified applicants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The University is outward looking, and actively engaged in a range of innovative developments in research, teaching and learning. The University has 17,000 students, with approximately 2,500 learners pursuing adult education/distance education/continuing education/professional development programmes ranging from certificates to degrees. The University has 4 Colleges and provides higher education qualifications in almost all disciplines.

➤ **University of Warsaw - PL**

The University of Warsaw (UW) is one of Poland's largest and finest universities. It offers 37 major fields and over 100 specializations in the Humanities and Earth, Social and Natural Sciences. All UW fields have the accreditation of the State Accreditation Committee (fields: Biology, Mathematics, Informatics and Economics were awarded outstanding ratings). Courses of studies at UW are also accredited by the University Accreditation Commission. The UW participates in the process of establishing the EHEA by realizing the goals of the Bologna Process. As a result, the quality of education assurance and enhancement system was built at the UW. The

University of Warsaw offers postgraduate studies and e-learning studies (The Centre of Open Multimedia Education – COME). The part of UW structure is also the Open University. Its mission is to provide a high quality education services for adults, regardless their educational level, social status or their socio-political views.

The Consortium presents a project team which has technical, academic and professional expertise to undertake the task of developing guidelines for QA in Continuing Education Programmes. Furthermore staff involved are representatives of the envisaged end-user categories of project outcomes: HEIs Quality Assurance officers, administrative and teaching staff involved in the organisation and management of continuing education programmes, academic authorities.

During the Pilot stage AlmaLaurea, thanks to its experience and the high level of technical profiles involved (staticians and IT developers), will give a crucial contribution in the development of innovative tools.

Coimbra Group has the clearly assigned role to foster the dissemination and exploitation strategy.

5. Plans for the Future

1 - Development activities: Pilot Stage

The second year of the project will open with the **Core Group Workshop 3** (*Warsaw 18,19 of October*).

During the first session of the workshop the Core Group members will discuss the final version of the QACEP Framework and then the activities of the pilot stage will be launched.

During the Pilot Stage, the Consortium will test a format to report upon the evaluation (self evaluation in specific) of continuing education programmes which should be applicable in different contexts and it will develop a survey based on stakeholders interviews. Furthermore the pilot will test the use of specific systems for data collection and information organization thanks to a web platform.

Steps in the development of the **pilot stage** will be :

- a. **Set up of Pilot Stage methodologies and tools**: during the Core Group Workshop in Warsaw and during the workshop follow up activities (*October – December 2010*) the Consortium will set up and validate the methodologies to be used and will draft the main tools:
 - **evaluation report model**: partners will decide the set of information which will be included in the evaluation report according to the QACEP framework for continuing education courses. It will contain description fields to be filled with the relevant information required by the QA framework to highlight quality factors of the continuing education courses. It will also contain quantitative indicators. The format will be available on the web site
 - **questionnaire to be used in the survey**
- b. **Selection in every partner HEIs of continuing education programmes to be involved** (at least 2 for each partner involved)
- c. **Development of intranet web form and online questionnaire**: the collection of all the information required by the evaluation report, will be supported by an intranet web form linked to a data base that will contain also the data collected in the surveys.
- d. **Data collection**: Partner Universities/Institutes will support their own selected programmes in filling in the informative fields of the format. The report will be filled directly on the web form. During a **Core Group Workshop** to be held in March hosted by AlmaLaurea Consortium will assess the activities already carried out.
- e. At the end all the qualitative and quantitative information will be organized in the common format through a publishing system already developed by the UNIBO's IT services. All the qualitative and quantitative information collected for of each Continuing Education Programme participating in the pilot will be organized in a single document (one for each Programme) through a publishing system developed by the UNIBO IT services.

- f. **Follow up of Pilot Stage**: during the **Core Group Workshop 5/Pilot Results** (by the end of June 2011, hosted by the UCC – Ireland) the Consortium will assess the work undertaken during the pilot stage. They will also discuss the main feedbacks from the participants of the pilot concerning: the use of the Evaluation Report Model and the overall surveys methodologies, the efficiency and efficacy of these tools in CE programmes assessment procedures.
- **Expected results**: The evaluation report model and the survey tools (by the end of the project these tools will be downloadable from the website of the project together with a brief report summarizing the pilot stage conclusions). A final document will be published on the web site, reporting the pilot outcomes by each individual partner and summarizing the major difficulties, challenges and suggestions for optimisation that can be drawn from the pilots.

2 – Manual and European Seminar: exploiting project results

In the way to exploit the use of the products developed, a **short Manual** will be published (September 2011) and made available on the website. It will focus on the main results of the project and will include the overall framework for quality assurance of continuing education programmes further fine-tuned after the Pilot stage. All the basic components of the Framework will be illustrated by some relevant examples of good practices. The Manual will also give operational indication and guidelines for organisational/technical solutions, based on the experimental use of the evaluation report information model and the survey methodologies tools. A certain number of manuals will be published and distributed to stakeholders.

An **European Seminar** will be organised in September 2011. The seminar will take place in Brussels and will be organized by the Coimbra Group to present to relevant stakeholders and future end users the main results achieved and to promote the Manual.

3 – Dissemination and Evaluation of results

Dissemination will continue in the second year. In November the **“QACEP Comparative analysis report”** will be widely disseminated thanks to the presentation at the EQAF, thanks to partners the dissemination channels identified by the partners and through the newsletters of the Coimbra Group and of the associations the Consortium is in contact with.

In the following months dissemination activities will concern also the new outcomes that will be delivered by the Consortium.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The topic developed by the project has a strong European dimension because **QACEP addresses two main priorities in the EHEA agenda: Quality Assurance and Lifelong Learning.**

The *London Communiqué*, and following Bologna Process Ministerial Declarations and Communiqués, stressed that efforts are still necessary for “a more systematic development of flexible learning paths to **support lifelong learning** as well as “to increase the sharing of good practice and to work towards a **common understanding of the role of higher education in lifelong learning**”.

In the pursuit of this aim, HEIs must define wider and articulated strategies for lifelong learning by experimenting specific tools and paths in degree programmes, but also by finding “ways to open up education services to returning learners” and to open up confrontation with different stakeholders in labour market and with other professional education providers (EUA, *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning*), for example by experimenting specific tools and paths in Bologna BMD degree courses to grant guidance activities for a diversified student population and adapting study programmes in a lifelong learning perspective. Continuing Education Programmes can be considered as a practice in this overall strategy (cf. EUA Trends 2010: Lifelong learning is regarded either as a strategy within which all education is provided in a lifelong perspective and as providing of a series of activities outside mainstream education – this concept can be found in nearly all European HEIs).

EUA *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning* underlines that LLL should be approached from a strategic institutional perspective and that **LLL should be included in the institutional quality culture**. Thus, by considering Continuing Education as one of the Universities' LLL activities it is evident that QA for continuing education should be part of the institutional quality culture.

The innovative character of this project, and the main contribution to EU policies, is the **focus on specific issues in the quality assurance of HEIs' Continuing Education Programmes**. QA is the object of several projects, studies and surveys, due to the relevance it has in implementing the EHEA. The same for what concerns studies on Lifelong Learning Practices in HEIs (for example Trends V and the project BeFlex). But only some marginal studies on quality assessment in HEIs' Continuing Education Programmes have been carried out.

The European-level approach of the project is particularly important if we consider QA as an essential element in fostering the transparency, the accountability and the mutual trust required to promote workers' and learners' mobility throughout Europe. In fact cooperation at European level in this field is also important because European Commission proposed to member countries to develop convergence towards an European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Outputs that will be produced within the Consortium will be exploited into the institutional scopes of the partners and will be available to other HEIs in order to provide HEI community with a common awareness on continuing education among HEIs and with a set of concrete examples on how it's possible to implement QA systems for Continuing Education Programmes. Since the main responsibility for quality lies in HEIs, the overall results will have a positive impact on the development of Quality Assurance policies. Furthermore due to the fact that Continuing Education offer is characterizing current engagement of HEIs in lifelong learning, the project's results will have a strong impact on the enhancement of some Lifelong learning practices at European Higher Education.

