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Fifth European Quality Assurance Forum – Building Bridges: Making sense of QA in European, national and institutional contexts

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“Quality Assurance in HEIs’ Continuing Education Programmes in a European Perspective”

Paper reporting on the first stage of the project QACEP (www.qacep.eu), two years project funded by the European Commission started in October 2009

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Introduction

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Introduction

- Why continuing education?
- Continuing education at HEIs
- QA for CEPs in HEIs
- EU policies

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1. Why continuing education (CE)?

Innovative and creative educational systems with a lifelong learning perspective:

1) able to answer immediately to specific needs and continuously evolving and changing context:

- Social-economic developments
- March of the knowledge society

2) providing appropriate training of adults, including well specialized and graduate professionals.

2. Why CE provided at HEIs?

HEIs are fundamental actors in lifelong learning promotion:

- They provide research based higher education for lifelong learners
 - They are defining wider and articulated strategies for lifelong learning
 - They are engaged in providing continuing education and training programmes (“continuing education programmes” as one of HEIs LLL activities: cf. EUA Trends and EUCEN Beflex project)
 - CE for post graduates but also for secondary students with professional experience
 - CE to create opportunities for retraining and/or advanced specialization.
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3. QA for CEPs in HEIs

Growing number and relevance of continuing education programmes (CEPs)

THUS

Need for appropriate quality assurance systems has grown

- QA of CEPs need to be included in the quality assurance systems already in place
- An adapted approach for the quality assurance of CEPs is crucial considering:
 - the specific objectives of these programmes
 - the specific target groups
 - the variety of stakeholders involved
 - their specific relationship with labour market and society
 - the great variety in terms of duration, learner target groups, organisation
 - the lack of consolidated and long tradition (and sometimes a lack of consolidated rules, national regulations or guidelines for this kind of programmes).

Need for creating and sharing specific tools in this field

4. EU policies:

Quality Assurance and Lifelong Learning are two main priorities in the European Higher Education Area Agenda

Bologna Process, Ministerial Declarations and Communiqué

(2010) Budapest-Vienna Declaration

(2009) Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué

(2007) London Communiqué

European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning, European University Association (2008).

<http://www.eua.be/publications/#c398>

QA in LLL

- LLL should be approached from a strategic institutional perspective
 - QA mechanisms for LLL activities should be included in the institutional quality culture
 - Continuing education is one of the universities' LLL activities
 - Thus, QA for continuing education should be part of the institutional quality culture
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Introduction

QACEP project

- **Set-up**
- **Aim**
- **Phases**

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1. Set-up

- “Quality Assurance for HEIs’ Continuing Education Programmes (QACEP)”
 - Funded with support from the European Commission (Lifelong Learning Programme – Erasmus – Modernisation of Higher Education)
 - Two year project started in October 2009
 - Consortium composed of eight institutions:
 - six HEIs
 - University of Bologna – Italy
 - Aalto University – Finland
 - Katholieke Universiteit Leuven – Belgium
 - Institute for Lifelong Learning of the University of Barcelona – Spain
 - University College of Cork – Ireland
 - University of Warsaw - Poland
 - two associations representing a large number of other HEIs
 - Inter-University Consortium AlmaLaurea – Italy
 - Coimbra Group - European association of multidisciplinary universities
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2. Aim

To develop a general framework for quality assurance of CEP's offered by HEIs, compatible with and adapted to the needs and specific context of each individual HEI

To design concrete and practical tools for HEIs CEPs assessment.

Expected outcomes are meant to support HEIs on the strategic and management levels as well as on the programme level, to start and increase the QA systems of their continuing education programmes by taking advantage of a theoretical framework, operational indications and guidelines for organisational/technical solutions

In the way to exploit the use of the products developed, a short **Manual** will be published (September 2011) and made available on the project website.

An **European Seminar** will be organised in September 2011.

3. Phases

Three PHASES:

- To carry out a comparative analysis within the partner universities with regard to CEPs and with regard to QA in the field of, and/or relevant to, CEPs;
 - To design an overall framework on the basis of the analysis and by sharing and analysing good practices, considering the potential impact of these tools on CEPs quality assessment;
 - To conduct a “pilot evaluation” of a group of CEPs in order to examine some operational and organisational aspects and the feasibility of the QA framework.
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- Objectives
- Methodology

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1. Objectives

- Establish a common understanding amongst all partners about:
 - the definition and main characteristics of CEPs
 - quality assurance and its procedures
 - Identify the main commonalities and differences of quality assurance of CEPs.
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2. Methodology (1/2)

- Basis = pre-studies of the six HEIs
 - based on a template that has been designed to this aim
 - Advantages of using a template:
 - It guaranteed that the information provided touched the essential topics (next slide)
 - The information was mutually comparable
 - It resulted in an instrument that can be used to present a general state of the art with regard to QA for CEPs
-

2. Methodology (2/2)

- The **items addressed** within the pre-studies include:
 - a general introduction to the university/institute
 - the identification of continuing education within the institution
 - the identification of procedures for the design of the CEPs
 - the identification of quality assessment procedures
 - a SWOT analysis
 - the description of some good practices.
 - The template is **based on** the concept of the PDCA Deming quality cycle.
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QACEP project

Comparative analysis

Comparative analysis results

- **Variety of CEPs**
- **Characteristics of CEPs for the QACEP project**
- Programme management
- Quality management

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2. Variety of CEPs

All partner universities offer a broad variety of CEPs.

The table below shows an example of CEPs for each HEI.

To see the full description of all the variety of CEPs in QACEP, please refer to the [Comparative Analysis Report](#)

Comparative analysis results

University	Aalto University	IL3-UB	K.U.Leuven	UCC	UNIBO	University of Warsaw
Type of CE	Continuing education programmes	University extension certificate course	Postgraduate programmes	Adult and professional courses	Master Universitario 1st Level	Non-degree Postgraduate Programmes
Certification / attestation	Certificate granted by Lifelong Learning Institute Dipoli	University extension certificate	Postgraduate certificate granted by the university and signed by the rector	Higher Diploma	Certificate of Master Universitario 1st Level	Certificate up to formula of Ministry of Science and Higher Education
Size	6-50 contact days	Less than 30 teaching hours	At least 20 credits	60 credits full-time or part-time	Two years part-time	150 hours or more
Credits	1-60	Less than 3	20 or more	60	60 to 70	No credit bearing programme
Admission requirements	Academic bachelor or master (or equivalent)	No qualification necessary	Bachelor or Master	Bachelor or level 7 on NFQ or equivalent	Min 1st cycle degree (Bachelor)	Master degree (in special situations bachelors)

2. Characteristics of CEPs for the QACEP project (1/2)

A common set of characteristics was defined:

- Programmes are organised and certified by the university itself.
 - A minimum critical size (in hours or credits) is required
 - Participants make a certain progression during the programme
 - CEP usually consist of several identifiable parts
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2. Characteristics of CEPs for the QACEP project (2/2)

Overview of all CEPs of the partner institutions

[TABLE.doc](#)

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- Variety of CEPs
- Characteristics of CEPs for the QACEP project
- **Programme management**
- Quality management

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3. Programme management (planning and set-up procedures of CEPs)

- Initiative
 - Decision
 - Design
-

3. Programme management - Initiative

- Can be taken by a very wide range of persons or units but is **always** 'channelled' through internal units
 - Need for a programme is determined by both central and decentral bodies or a mixture of both
 - All have ways of monitoring whether or not the choice for continuing education is the best way to realize the intended goals
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3. Programme management - Decision

- Decision is **always** taken by a central unit or person
 - Often there is a preparatory procedure at institutional level prior to final formal approval
 - Common main categories of evaluation of CEP in procedures:
 - Economic/financial
 - Academic
 - Market related
-

3. Programme management - Design

- Design of the programme is **always** done internally at the university
 - Academic level is crucial and there should be a definition at least at each institution
 - Involvement of the professional field in designing the programme is very wide
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3. Programme management – Continuum

Decentral ----- Central

Influence of:

- more substantial CEPs vs. CEPs of a rather small size
 - more or less permanent CEPs vs. single, occasional or fluctuous CEPs
-

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- Programme management
- **Quality management**

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4. Quality management

- Responsibilities
 - Involvement of stakeholders
 - Evaluation
 - Methodology of evaluation
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4. Quality management – Responsibilities (1/2)

A distinction can be made between the responsibility for:

1. the overall quality and management of the programme
 2. the quality of the individual course
 3. the definition of QA procedures and policy decisions in the field of QA
 4. the administration and implementation of QA procedures and of evaluations
-

4. Quality management – Responsibilities (2/2)

Responsibilities situated in a continuum

Decentral ----- Central

1. the overall quality and management of the programme
 2. the quality of the individual course
 3. the definition of QA procedures and policy decisions in the field of QA
 4. the administration and implementation of QA procedures and of evaluations
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4. Quality management – Involvement of stakeholders

Many different stakeholders are involved
(in changing composition)

- Academics / students
 - External stakeholders
 - Labour market representatives
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4. Quality management – Evaluation (1/2)

- External / internal
 - CEPs are **not** involved in external QA procedures
 - Some institutions have internal QA standard procedures in place (reactive)
 - Stakeholders involved
 - **All** partners involve the participants of the programmes in the evaluations
 - Some also include other stakeholders
 - The involvement of the labour market in evaluations is crucial
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4. Quality management – Evaluation (2/2)

Subject of evaluation

Four main groups of topics in questionnaires:

- Teacher/teaching activities
 - Coherence and content of the programme
 - Professional orientation
 - Organisation and infrastructure
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4. Quality management – Methodology of evaluation

- Questionnaires, feedback discussions
 - Good practice:
 - Using more or less the same questionnaires for teachers and students
 - Integrating a part on the respondent's profile (of student or staff)
 - Using the same questionnaire for all programmes allows comparison
 - Using non-standard questionnaires leaves room to adapt the questionnaires to the specific context and characteristics
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The analysis revealed:

- many differences
- some commonalities

How QA of CEP is organised is influenced by:

- the central or decentral organisation of the university/institute for CEPs
 - the type/size of the CEPs
 - permanent CEPs vs. single, occasional CEPs
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Questions for discussion

- Plan-phase: what makes a CEP an academic programme?
 - Check-phase: which characteristics that are very specific to CEPs should be taken into account in designing the evaluation procedures?
 - PDCA-cycle: which role can be assigned to the external stakeholders (society, employers, ...) within the approach to quality assurance of CEPs and what are the limitations?
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