**Annex 9b: EADTU Regional SWOT on QA Europe**

“**Regional SWOT on quality   
in online, open and flexible education for Europe**”.

**8 June 2018**

**EADTU / George Ubachs and Piet Henderikx**

**European framework**

In European universities three areas of provision emerge: *degree education* as the backbone of a university; *continuing education* and continuous professional development, which probably will exceed the number of degree students; and *open education* which emerged mainly by the MOOC movement. Universities attempt policies and strategies to define their profile in these areas, which can be complementary to each other and to some extent interwoven (See annex 1).

Digital modes of teaching and learning can solve problems higher education is facing today and will offer new opportunities for teaching and learning in each of these areas. They will innovate and even transform higher education provisions in the course of next years:

* Blended degree education will raise the quality and efficiency of degree education, facing large numbers of students and lower staff/students ratios.
* Blended and online education will upscale the area of continuing education and continuous professional development (CPD) by offering flexible courses with a large outreach responding to the needs of learners at work, who face longer careers and career shifts.
* MOOCs are offered online only, providing massive and open learning opportunities for all, promoting engagement in the knowledge society.

Blended and online systems are important to accelerate innovation and to keep pace with the needs of learners of all ages and of society.

Changing times need new solutions, touching upon the structure of higher education provisions. There is a need for investment in lifelong learning in European societies, in particular in continuous education / continuous professional development. All member states need to extend their provisions.

In the area of continuing education, the deployment of short learning programmes (SLPs) is a most important solution. The *online* provision of SLP`s makes them even more scalable and flexible. They facilitate the accessibility of courses by learners and can be taken in combination with a job at all stages of life. SLPs should be awarded with appropriate qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas), corresponding with the European Qualification Framework.

In the framework of ICDE’s focal point approach to quality assurance of online education, EADTU has performed a SWOT analyses for Europe based on **three action lines:**

1. Survey on accreditation of QA in blended and online education
2. EADTU-ENQA Peer Learning Activity on QA in blended and online education
3. EADTU-ENQA PLA Questionnaire at 3 levels

**European SWOT**

The rationale for governments to implement quality assurance (QA) systems or processes is usually two-fold: they wish to be assured that the higher education that they fund (albeit in varying ways) is of sufficiently high quality, and they wish to ensure that it is being continuously improved, ie quality enhancement (QE). In almost all European countries, quality assurance for higher education is achieved through the establishment of agencies. Quality assurance agencies, whose role is to assess quality in the learning and teaching business also need at least some expertise in new modes of teaching by online and blended education, which they might best obtain by also having such staff in-house. This was proposed by the Dutch QA agency, NVAO, at the ENQA conference in Zagreb (Flierman, 2014).

If one of the tasks of external quality assurance agencies is to support the improvement of teaching and learning, they should also look to educational processes in universities and not just to learning outcomes. The quality of teaching and learning is also determining the quality of results. In systems, where the focus is more on institutional quality assurance, quality assurance agencies should make available to universities criteria and models for internal evaluation, also for digital modes of teaching and learning. Hence, quality assurance agencies play a pivotal role in institutional quality assurance processes.

Although several agencies in Europe have set important steps in evaluating and valuing innovation and quality enhancement by digital education, there is still a way to go in other countries. Only a minority of agencies is giving criteria, indicators, guidelines or examples of good practice for improvement to institutions. ENQA can assure that expertise and good practice are shared between agencies and that specific criteria, benchmarks, guidelines and frameworks are developed and disseminated to institutions.

Relevant criteria, indicators or guidelines are published by agencies in Cyprus, Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the UK, learning and teaching in general, including e-learning, is covered by the Quality Code”. These guidelines are a good basis for sharing criteria and indicators for quality assurance as are also frameworks, benchmarks and criteria for quality assurance developed by international associations in the field (ICDE study, 2016; EADTU, E-xcellence, 2015 ).

Already, ENQA has taken a pro-active role in response to latest developments in online and blended education by setting up a Working Group on E-Learning. This WG on E-Learning is consisting of some 10 quality assurance agencies.

The objectives of the ENQA WG on e-learning are:

- Create an inventory of sources on quality assurance and e-Learning.

- Agree on definition of e-learning.

- Agree on recommendations (QAA and HEIs).

Based on EADTU’s study on accreditation of online education and recent cooperation with ENQA in the SEQUENT project (<https://www.sequent-network.eu/>), both organisations decided on organising the EADTU-ENQA Peer Learning Activity on blended and online education for September 2017.

This forms the basis for a structured dialogue between stakeholders; EADTU (HE institutions), ENQA (QA agencies) and governments.

Interesting is Esther Huertas Hidalgo (Chair ENQA WG E-Learning) view on how to include ways forward in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015), in particular with respect to the role of agencies in quality assurance for blended and online / distance programmes. Main challenge is to share the understanding on quality assurance for new modes of teaching and learning by higher education institutions (HEI) and professionals/teaching staff within institutions. Also, how can the agencies get the message across in line with the role of agencies. In the logic of the European Standards and Guidelines, the applicability of standards has to be examined and how indicators can be fine-tuned, taking into account challenges from HEIs, government and quality assurance agencies.

The ENQA working group now aims at providing a generic framework and a common basis for national and institutional activities by those standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG). They should be applied to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery (transnational education, e-learning, short courses…). Blended and online learning provisions fulfil the same standards (ESG) as traditional ones.

Thus, all types of e-learning are included as well as all phases in the learning process (e.g. e-assessment). It applies to all types of quality assurance activities, agencies (quality audits, program accreditation, institutional assessment...) and quality assurance purposes (enhancement/improvement, accountability).

From the peer learning activity, including all 3 stakeholder organisations we have identified the following main SWOT elements for European introduction and quality assurance of online and blended education.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **POSITIVE** | **NEGATIVE** |
|  | **STRENGTHS** | **WEAKNESSES** |
| **INTERNAL** | **At the university level:**  The strong presence of learning environments/digital technology at European universities;  Good practices in blended teaching and learning, although in many universities dispersed; incremental implementation;  The MOOC movement has resulted in broader awareness and acceptance of the added value of blended and online education  Strong digital skills of students and teachers  A strong leadership in frontrunner universities, developing blended mainstream education, online continuous education/CPD and open education/MOOCs  There is an objective strong need for enhancing the quality of education for large student numbers in mainstream education at a reasonable cost (Daniel’s iron triangle). Blended and online can extend the classroom as well as create smaller learning communities  **At Quality Assurance agency level:**  The national quality assurance agencies in the ENQA network represent a wide range of expertise in quality assurance (institutional, program level)  As blended and online education are gradually developed in most European universities, institutional quality assurance services will be involved in evaluation reviews in these areas  The widely referred Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance can be a perfect framework for adopting fit criteria and indicators for quality assurance in blended and online education  Within this framework, national Quality Assurance Agencies adopt quality assurance guidelines and inform institutions about criteria, indicators, guidelines on blended and online education. Institutional systems further support the quality of online and blended education.  ENQA provides the opportunity to exchange expertise in blended and online education  Several QA agencies are already active in ENQA’s WG E-Learning  Some national agencies have elaborated systematically criteria and indicators for quality assurance in blended and online education (UK, Cyprus, Portugal,..)  The E-xcellence Manual and benchmarking instruments are widely used in insitutional qa and by enqa members (open license)  ENQA can facilitate the sharing of good practice between its members to improve quality criteria, indicators and guidelines; This will also continuously improve quality assurance practices at the university level.  From this perspective of continuous improvement, it would be necessary to stay up-to-date with the current discussion in the field and to establish ways of permanent exchange of experience and expertise, e.g. workshops with institutions, ENQA members, expert organisations and stakeholders.  The EADTU-ENQA Peer Learning Activity on QA in blended and online education (Sept. 2017) has led to a structured dialogue of stakeholders. | **At the university level:**  In many universities, the leadership still doesn’t develop innovative policies, strategic plans, frameworks for innovation in teaching and learning  Blended and online teaching and learning is developed incrementally, not systematically Often the use of ICT-based modes of teaching and learning and innovation is only based on the commitment of individuals  Some institutions are engaged, but developments are going slow and efforts are dispersed and not systemic enough.  Inertia in academia to innovate. Academic culture not in favour of innovation. Attitudes of students and staff towards online learning  Misconceptions on blended/online teaching  Low awareness of innovative pedagogies;  Institutional expertise on the design of blended and online teaching and learning not well developed  Blended and online learning competencies of staff not enough developed  Institutional educational support frameworks not well developed  Institutional quality framework didn’t enough adopt criteria and indicators for blended and online education and innovation  No adequate solutions for the changing roles and related workload of staff  No clear incentives for career development;  **At Quality Assurance agency level:**  Criteria, indicators and guidelines for blended and online education are not yet enough developed and implemented in quality assurance systems and reviews  Difficult finding experts for reviewing blended and online courses and programs  In some agencies, more attention for outcomes, less for processes |
|  | **OPPORTUNITIES** | **THREATS** |
| **EXTERNAL** | Educational technology becomes stronger, more fit to blended and online course design and to independent learning (the new yOU-platform of the Open University of the Netherlands)  Educational theories and design science becomes stronger  Innovative pedagogies and examples of good practice are published (CPL, Innovative Pedagogies UKOU, Envisioning report of EADTU/EMPOWER)  CPD is organised for leadership and staff (EMPOWER, EOLLA)  The MOOC movement is inspiring many. The MOOC platforms contribute to innovative strategies and practices (EMC consortium, edX, etc)  It is expected that there will be more requests on accreditation of online study programmes in the near future  EU policies in favour of the modernisation of higher education  Some countries develop strategies for innovation and blended and online education | The funding per student for higher education is decreasing in many EU universities  Weak governmental strategies in many EU countries |