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## **SEQUENT: SUPPORTING QUALITY IN E-LEARNING EUROPEAN NETWORKS**

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### **Introduction**

The Commission intends to launch its new strategy, focused on the use of ICT and open educational resources (OER) to enhance education and skills development, by mid-2013. We fully agree with Commissioner Vassiliou's statement: "The digital revolution must not stop at the classroom. The web, social networks and online open educational resources offer huge possibilities to modernise teaching and learning. These are areas where EU cooperation adds value and delivers results".

Already in the consultation round of "Opening up Education – it was stated that OER and ICT as means of modern learning can radically change teaching and assessment practices". The Commission rightly so recognises that Europe is and should be heading towards a more open and flexible education. Not only for students in the category of 25+, but certainly more and more for regular on-campus students as well.

E-learning has become mainstream provision in European higher education and is essential in supporting lifelong learning and internationalisation. By becoming integral part of higher education, e-learning should also be integral part of the QA systems, internal and external, with related innovative and appropriate criteria. In practice this is however not the case. In the E-learning Quality (ELQ) report (Report 2008:11R) the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE) surveyed the work on quality assurance of e-learning in higher education on a European level in nine selected countries. One conclusion is that quality in e-learning is a non-issue for many. To this end, there is a need for methodological development within quality assurance agencies. At the same time, there is a need for increased cooperation between national agencies as e-learning enhances the development of borderless education.

The recommendations in this regard from the ENQA Sigtuna Seminar on QA in e-learning (Oct. 2009) were the following:

- Establish a solid quality assurance system in Europe;
- eLearning should not be evaluated separately;
- There is a need for a common definition and understanding on all aspects of eLearning;
- There is a need for a “common language” that would help higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies strive for the same goal;
- It is important to meet and discuss quality assurance at the European level and between different stakeholders in the educational sector;
- Provide adequate training for academic professionals, higher education providers and quality evaluation experts.

The current systems of QA in e-learning and open learning are offered by E-xcellence and UNIQUE support university changes and teacher education by quality benchmarking e-learning performance.

The SEQUENT project therefore in line with the EU actions and ENQA’s recommendations supports the demand for quality in the use of ICT (e-learning) and OER by universities and quality agencies in HE.

With the SEQUENT project we want to reach out to a wider group of stakeholders European wide in a combined action of the E-xcellence and UNIQUE models for QA in e-learning and support universities in their ambition to a more open and flexible offering. Finding a common approach for the promotion of Quality Assurance in Europe will lead to much more effectiveness than stand-alone actions from the three respective partners.

The “SEQUENT” project aims to promote excellence in the use of ICT in higher education, with a clear goal to prepare European Universities in line with the European Modernization Agenda and to make higher education in Europe fit better to cross-border collaboration initiatives in the implementation of innovative and ICT enhanced partnerships.

## **Approach**

The project will use models that have been developed by previous European funded projects and other internationally recognised models that enhance the quality of ICT uptake in Higher Education and have proven their effectiveness in Europe and elsewhere. Through the organisation of conferences, workshops and training events, excellence models and tools will be presented to delegates from HE institutions. Furthermore the partners of the consortium will use their extensive membership for targeted awareness raising campaigns and communication activities. This way, we aim to accelerate the uptake and create awareness in the European HE community on the importance of a mainstreamed ICT uptake.

The specific objectives of this project will be to:

- Convince governments, universities and QA agencies of the necessity to have a QA approach for e-Learning provision;
- To raise awareness on Open and flexible learning among higher education institutions and networks in the form of lobby activities, profiling and conference presentations throughout the mainstream education channels;
- Further disseminate instruments for different applications of QA and a clear summary of the available method and to promote UNIQUE and E-xcellence as examples of these instruments, promoted towards the same or different stakeholders (sometimes overlap);
- To support universities in the adoption of a QA and e-Learning strategy, through dissemination and raining activities.

The project will reach out to national governments, QA-Agencies and universities in our message to include quality methods of ICT-base approaches. To increase impact we will approach associations of universities to bring the topic of open and flexible education and the quality aspect on the agenda and organise seminars and (on-line) Master classes with them.

The two main quality models, developed respectively by EFQUEL and EADTU and applying on the HE institution on strategic level; on degree and faculty level; and on course level, promoted by this project, will be the following:

- With **E-xcellence**, a benchmarking and assessment scheme for enhancing the quality of degrees and university programmes, EADTU is leading a European movement on QA in e-learning. More specifically, the building of an e-learning benchmarking community of Associates in Quality. The E-xcellence Associates label is a label for institutions/faculties using the E-xcellence instrument for self-assessment and take measures of improvement accordingly. E-xcellence therefore is an instrument for educational innovation towards improved e-learning performance. (<http://e-xcellencelabel.eadtu.eu/>)
- **UNIQUE** is a high quality institutional certification for outstanding use of ICT in learning and teaching in traditional HE institutions. It is an excellence award to universities or institutes, after a process of self- assessment and external peer review, for renewable periods of three years. The fundamental feature of the UNIQUE approach is to support institutions of higher education to measure how successful they are in technology-enhanced learning and to allow for continuous improvement. (<http://unique.efquel.org/>)
- **ECBCheck**, a result of collaboration between EFQUEL, GIZ and various international cooperation and capacity building institutions has produced a tool and certification scheme for e-Learning courses. (<http://www.ecb-check.org/>)
- **OpenupEd** is a benchmarking quality approach on MOOCs that aims to contribute to an opening up of education to the benefit of both of learners and of wider society while

reflecting European values such as equity, quality and diversity.  
(<http://www.openuped.eu/>)

By this inclusive approach, we aim to respond to the specific needs and context of HE institutions that need support whether in a very specific field or in a more broad strategic effort.

## **Partnership**

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (**EADTU**) is Europe's institutional network for open and online HE. Its mission is to support the members and HE systems by developing a shared vision and leadership for the role of open and flexible HE by student-centred teaching, flexible learning across institutional boundaries.

The European Foundation for Quality in E-learning (**EFQUEL**) is a membership organisation that aims to promote excellence and innovation in education in order to achieve qualitative learning opportunities in Europe and beyond.

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (**ENQA**) promotes European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in HE and disseminates information and expertise among its members and towards stakeholders in order to develop and share good practice and to foster the European dimension of quality assurance.

## **Contact**

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