

Preface

This manual is the outcome of an EADTU coordinated project, under the EU e-Learning Programme, on Quality Assurance in e-learning. It represents a quality benchmarking assessment instrument that covers the pedagogical, organisational and technical frameworks of e-learning provision, with special attention on accessibility, flexibility and interactiveness of higher education programmes and courses.

The initiative was taken on behalf of the EADTU members that indicated to strongly miss the e-learning specific criteria in the current QA-systems. This is seen as a shortcoming for showing the institutions specific expertise in this field as well as being unable to find directions in further improving their e-learning performance.

The E-xcellence instrument supplements existing QA systems with e-learning specific issues and addresses directly the higher and adult education sector as well as the assessment and accreditation bodies.

From the start, the approach was taken in creating an instrument that would not interfere with the current systems, but supplement these as an optional building block for e-learning providing institutions. E-xcellence therefore works within existing QA frameworks rather than re-inventing them. This helped the introduction of the E-xcellence instrument European wide as a valuable asset to the internal and external quality assurance systems for higher education.

In a combined partnership of EADTU network members, the Dutch Flemish Accreditation Body (NVAO) and the European University Association (EUA) we have worked out an instrument that consists of 3 main elements.

- Manual on QA in e-learning, covering:
 - o the 33 benchmarks on e-learning
 - o the indicators related to these benchmarks
 - o guidance for improvement
 - o references to excellence level performance
- Assessors Notes, to provide a more detailed account of the issues and the approaches
- Tools
 - o Quick Scan
 - o Full- Assessment

Next to the partnership, stakeholders and policymakers were involved from the start to ensure a well-supported approach.

The project formed a comparative analyses with exchange of experiences on elearning excellence.

This work being so valuable and appreciated in the higher education community is for the greater part owing to the commitment and expertise the various partners brought into this work.

The EUA-evaluation report on the E-xcellence instrument, January 2007, highlighted the following: "By modelling the E-xcellence tool on the needs and interests of institutions and giving them a choice of modes with different degrees of intensity, the tool incorporates what has been endorsed on the European level as good practice in external quality assurance processes. Moreover, by developing a set of benchmarks for the European level to build its tool on, the E-xcellence project has contributed toward building a European dimension for the specific field of e-learning".

Since the first on-line publication (www.eadtu.nl/e-xcellenceqs) we have updated the instrument and started to further mainstream E-xcellence European wide under

E-xcellence+ (www.eadtu.nl/e-xcellenceplus). This is of importance as quality assurance in e-learning is of growing interest. Not only has e-learning grown to a mainstream provision of education in Open universities as well as traditional universities, but is also becoming the main instrument of internationalisation in education. Quality assurance in higher education is a fundamental aspect of continued internationalisation.

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