

Case Study

A) General Part

General	
Case Study Title	Quality Assurance for Higher Education Institutions' Continuing Education Programmes (QACEP)
DIALOGUE thematic group	Quality
Date of the case study	
Contact Information	Mart Achten
Name of the institution	KU Leuven
Location/country	Belgium
Size of the organisation/ Number of academic/research and non-academic/administrative staff	9000 staff members, 36 000 students
Website	https://www.qacep.eu
Abstract	
Key words	quality assurance, continuing education programmes, higher education, lifelong learning
Please provide a short abstract of the case study	The project "Quality Assurance for HEIs" Continuing Education Programmes (QACEP)", in which 8 European institutions were involved, aimed at developing a general framework for quality assurance of CEPs offered by HEIs, compatible with the specific needs and context of each HEI, and at elaborating practical tools for their quality assessment. QACEP was a project funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. KU Leuven was one of the members of the consortium. The project ran from October 2009 until October 2011.



B) Specific Part

The following part depends on each thematic group, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the chosen situations.

1. Context

Please present the general background (“landscape of experience”) of the activity and in which institutions, organisations, units or sectors the case took place.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are key actors in lifelong learning promotion. For this reason 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 provision of advanced Continuing Education and Training courses. Considering the increasing and great relevance of this variety of offers, at the intersection between HEIs, professional practice and general vocational continuing education and training, it is evident the need for transparency and external accountability and the need to assess their quality just like for higher education mainstream courses. Therefore there is a clear evidence about the need for creating and sharing specific tools in this field.

The QACEP project wanted to meet these needs by developing a general framework for QA of Continuing Education programmes by HEIs. The Consortium was composed by eight institutions (five Higher Education Institutions and a Foundation attached to a University with a broad experience in the field of QA and/or in Continuing Education Programmes and two associations representing a large number of other HEIs universities).

KU Leuven was one of the higher education institutions participating in the project. Within KU Leuven, two departments were involved:

- The Office for Educational Policy, which supports the academic authorities of the KU 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.
- The Media and Learning Unit 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. Media and Learning Unit also hosts the Lifelong Learning unit and the studycentre of the Open University.

2. Objectives and Purposes

What are the objectives and purposes of the concrete action?

The main aim of the project was to develop a general framework for QA of Continuing Education Programmes offered by HEIs, compatible and adapted to the needs and special

features of each individual HEIs, and to elaborate concrete and practical tools for their quality assessment.

3. Combination of research and practice

How does this activity combine insights from research and practical hands-on experience?

The research conducted in the framework of the project was transformed into practical tools for the HEIs involved. In this way there a clear dialogue has been established between research and practice.

Three stages could be distinguished in the project:

1. Research stage: A comparative analysis was conducted in order to establish a common understanding amongst all partners, the starting point will be the identification of the specific characteristics of continuing education programmes, within the partner Universities/Institutes, that are particularly relevant for the design of a QA system.
2. Design stage: On the basis of the research, the general framework was designed by sharing and analysing the selected good practices, considering the potential impact of these tools to continuing education programmes quality assessment in different university contexts.
3. Pilot stage: This framework was also evaluated by a pilot of a group of Continuing Education Programmes using the overall framework and concrete and specific tools to test some operational and organisational aspects and the feasibility of the framework.

Approaches and methodologies:

- bottom up analysis and benchmark within partner institutions;
- involvement of different stakeholders such as internal administrative and teaching staff responsible for the management and organisation of Continuing Education Programmes and Quality Assurance, IT developers, Staticians and technical advisors for survey design and implementation, Bologna and LLP Experts;
- discussion working groups and distance work.

4. Instruments for implementation

Does the institution/sector/unit provide instruments (e.g. ICT or human resources) for the implementation of the concrete action? Which tools were applied?

The QACEP project was a project funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. KU Leuven was one of the members of the consortium and like other partners therefore received funding for the completion of the tasks within the different work packages.

5. Best practice/ Bad practice:

What kind of results were obtained? What do you consider to be the innovative or interesting part of this concrete action?

What are the barriers (potential and effective) to the full implementation of this action and what are its benefits?

In which sense can this action be useful for DIALOGUE?

One of the outcomes of the project was the QACEP handbook. This handbook was published in order to facilitate the wide dissemination of the outcomes and results of the QACEP Project. The Handbook focuses on the principal outcomes of the project and includes the overall framework for quality assurance of continuing education programmes further refined after consideration of the outcomes of the Pilot stage. All the basic components of the Framework are illustrated by some relevant examples of good practices. In the appendices the Handbook provides the text of the key tools developed.

This Handbook is supported by all the information and full details published on the QACEP Project web site:

- QACEP Comparative Analyses Report and Template Model
- QACEP Framework + suggested toolkit
- QACEP Student Evaluation Questionnaire
- QACEP Evaluation Report for Continuing Education Programmes

This handbook is very useful and could be of interest for HEIs that are in the process of assessing the quality of their continuing education programmes.

6. Direct link of researchers and practitioners in this activity

Are researchers and practitioners directly linked in this activity?

- If yes, how are they linked and what are the communication and interaction processes?
- If they do not communicate directly, how are findings from research connected to practical activities and vice versa?

This project gave the opportunity for the staff that are directly involved in the implementation of continuing education programmes, to conduct research about the quality assurance of these programmes. Therefore the role of researchers and practitioners were often combined in the same people.

7. Transferable elements

Which elements would you identify as easily transferable to other institutions in different regional and national contexts?

8. Recommendations for dissemination

Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for other ULLL managers and practitioners – these may include risks as well as benefits.

Please formulate some recommendations for the dissemination on the basis of the case study addressed to the working group and other partners.

9. Additional information

Please state additional sources like bibliography, website, publications, reports

<https://www.qacep.eu>

We are intending to put your case study on the website.

Please tick here if you do **not** wish to see your case study published on the project's website

ANNEX I

Example: New Media TWG. (How to connect virtual and physical space?)

