

Results from the benchmarking initiatives conducted by Lund University showed that advantages and benefits with eLearning and e-courses can and probably also have to be transmitted to Campus courses and to be integrated in all areas, as a natural part of education in the 21st century. The goals and working methods of quality assurance processes involve a sustainable development, internationalisation, boundless education, constructive alignment and scholarships for teaching and learning, critical colleagues and peer reviews, and continuous benchmarking at national and international levels. The discourse and debate in the field explicitly shows the need for innovation within teaching and learning in higher education and reconstruction of universities concerning how courses are designed and offered (Bates, a, b, c; Batson, 2010; Nygren & Larsson, 2010; Ossiannilsson & Landgren, 2010a, b, c; Robinson, 2010).

5.6. Conclusion

Through the findings from participating in benchmarking processes and the ongoing discourse and debate in the area, it seems that higher education will need to meet challenges at different levels. First, to meet the new multitasking generation of learners in the 21st century with new skills, especially e- and mobile skills. Second, living in a global world demands boundless and mobile education within the lifelong learning context and sustainable development perspectives. Third, universities need to function within new innovative structures to meet collaborative learning processes. Education, teaching and learning methods need to be reconstructed, and teachers' e-maturity developed. Research also shows strong connections between successfully implemented eLearning and strong conscious management and leadership at all levels (Ossiannilsson, 2010a, Ossiannilsson & Landgren a, b, c).

Taking part in benchmarking has proved valuable in several ways, as expressed both by ESMU (van Vaught, 2008a, b) and Moritary (2008). It has had implications for internal changes. Through active participation in benchmarking exercises, Lund University has established a reputation for sharing experience both at the internal and the international level. The final conclusion is the value of continuous benchmarking exercises in different areas for the purpose of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education, and, in this respect, of meeting the demands of individuals for boundless education.

The Sigtuna workshop concluded and agreed that the accreditation, audit and assurance processes of e-learning should be integrated in national framework and not be evaluated separately. This was also suggested by NAHE (2008). There is a need, however, for methodological development within quality assurance agencies. At the same time, there are demands for increased cooperation between national, European agencies and international agencies, as eLearning enhances the development of boundless education. Hopbach (ENQA, 2009) concluded the Sigtuna workshop 2009 with three statements:

1. *It is important to meet and discuss quality assurance at the European level and between different stakeholders in the educational sector*
2. *There is a need for a "common" definition of eLearning, to so to say know what we are speaking about, and have a common language.*
3. *And finally, eLearning must be an integrated part in higher education and quality assurance has to cover all aspects of eLearning. Furthermore, there are demands of expertise by the evaluators.*

Additionally, it is important to mention that the challenges of eLearning have to be embedded beyond and boundless, but with an innovative and creative approach. However, the most important challenges are to consider the conditions that will facilitate optimal and powerful learning processes for students, including the entire process from interest in university studies to application, studies, exams and credits, and all the way to alumni. Professionalism in all aspects of learning, eLearning and mobile learning is a key condition for the achievement of boundless and academic global learning environments in the 21st century. NAHE (2010b) has recently conducted a survey on distance education in Sweden, probably bringing back results in relation to the *ELQ* model for the consideration of national agencies.

References

References upon request from Ebba Ossiannilsson
Ebba.Ossiannilsson@ced.lu.se; Ebba.Ossiannilsson@oulu.fi

Conclusion

As the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in modern educational activities is creating alternative study paths, eLearning has become one of the most prominent concepts within the higher education institutions of today.

eLearning has become a particularly attractive educational method, as the use of web-based tools reduces the costs of sharing vast amounts of data, reduces communication barriers and geographical distance gaps between individuals, increases academic mobility in higher education, provides people with disabilities to have better access to higher education, and allows smaller institutions to gain international visibility through study programmes online.

eLearning faces, however, certain challenges. As eLearning is dependent on the ICT as the primary teaching and learning tool, the prerequisite for an effective eLearning process is that learners have sufficient ICT skills, and programme providers have sufficient professional competence and adequate educational strategies to manage distance programmes with the help web-based tools. Thus, it should be emphasised that eLearning is efficient only as long as the learning content is updated regularly and the teaching methodology used in the distance programmes helps the learners to master the learning material and to acquire knowledge. In short, eLearning must respond to its stakeholders' needs. This involves quality assurance agencies.

The articles in this publication show that there is only very little experience in the assessment of eLearning in Europe. In fact, eLearning quality is rarely included as a regular or integral part of national quality reviews, nor is any emphasis placed on the ESG. In short, quality assurance of eLearning remains yet to be developed. Thus, quality assurance agencies should adapt to the alternative learning and teaching methods and to the associated challenges that the ICT create, and develop assessment standards and benchmarks that would help the traditional universities make the necessary internal transformations and enable methodical evaluation and improvement of eLearning.

It is therefore vital to establish a solid quality assurance system in Europe for greater accessibility to and quality of eLearning. eLearning should not be evaluated separately, but as an integrated part in higher education. Moreover, quality assurance has to cover all aspects of eLearning. There is a need for a common definition and understanding of the concept of eLearning, a need for a "common language" that would help higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies strive for the same goal. To meet this goal, it is important to meet and discuss quality assurance at the European level and between different stakeholders in the educational sector and to provide adequate training for academic professionals, higher education providers and quality evaluation experts.

ANNEX 1

– Programme of the workshop

ENQA Workshop

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF E-LEARNING

7-8 October, 2009

Hosted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE)

Venue:

Kristina Konferens & Hotell

Rektor Cullbergs väg 1

193 23 Sigtuna

Sweden

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

DAY 1

Wednesday

7 October, 2009

12:00 Lunch

13:00 Welcome addresses

Lena Adamson, Secretary General, NAHE

Achim Hopbach, President, ENQA

Introduction to the workshop and the ELQ-report – aspects and criteria,

Per Westman, NAHE

13:45 The UNIQUE (EFQUEL) approach to quality in E-learning,

Annemie Boonen, European Foundation for Quality in E-learning (EFQUEL)

The E-xcellence (EADTU) approach to quality in E-learning,

George Ubachs, European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU)

15:15 Coffee break

15:45 Discussion theme 1 – Quality assurance specific for E-learning

What are the new aspects and criteria specific for E-learning that need to be considered?

Panel discussion with higher education institution and open university

representatives.

Panelists:

Göran Karlsson, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Denise Kirkpatrick, The Open University, UK

Josep Lladós, The Open University of Catalonia, Spain

Ebba Ossiannilsson, Lund University, Sweden

Chaired by *Per Westman*

-17:15

17:30 Pick-up from the hotel for a guided walk in the medieval town of Sigtuna

19:30 Dinner at the workshop venue

DAY 2

Thursday

8 October, 2009

9:00 The UK approaches to quality in e-learning, as seen from the HE Academy/ JISC benchmarking programmes

Paul Bacsich, Matic Media Ltd, UK

9:45 ELQ report, Policy issues for quality assurance agencies

Per Westman, NAHE, Sweden

10:00 Coffee break

10:30 E-learning in the context of the Standards and Guidelines for the Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG),

Josep Grifoll, ENQA Board member, AQU Catalonia, Spain

11:00 Discussion theme 2 –Challenges for quality assurance organisations

How can the e-learning criteria be implemented in national evaluation programmes?

In the “ELQ” report, the following issues are emphasised when integrating the assessment of E-learning into the general assessment framework:

- The integration of the quality assessment of E-learning to national reviews requires specific competence within the assessing organisation.
- Cross-boundary education requires cooperation and exchange of knowledge between quality assurance agencies in order to harmonise and safeguard strategies and policies for the quality assurance of E-learning.

- Extensive methodological development is necessary in order to adapt common methods for the assessment of the quality of E-learning in higher education.

Panel discussion with representatives from quality assurance agencies.

Panelists:

Esther Huertas Hidalgo, AQU Catalonia, Spain

Fred Mulder, NVAO, the Netherlands

Yuri Rubin, AQA, Russia

Chaired by *Josep Grifoll*

12:15 Lunch

13:15 Discussion Theme 3 – Future cooperation

How can European level cooperation and continuous knowledge exchange be built between quality assurance agencies, organisations with experience in the quality of E-learning and with other stakeholders?

Panelists:

Love Hansson, European Students' Union (ESU)

Carl Holmberg, International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE)

George Ubachs, EADTU

Chaired by Achim Hopbach

14:30 Conclusions

14:45 End of Workshop and coffee



ENQA held a workshop in coordination with the National Agency for Higher Education, in Sigtuna, Sweden in October, 2009. The workshop created a dialogue between institutions, quality assurance agencies, students and other stakeholders who are directly affected by the quality of E-learning. This report gives a general overview of the matters discussed and challenges faced within the sector of quality assurance in E-learning.



Workshop report 14

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