



## D.5.1- Recommendations for quality assurance and accreditation for short learning programmes

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## 1. About ESLP Project

This report is published as part of the E-SLP project: European Short Learning Programmes. The E-SLP project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and from 1 January 2018 until 31 December 2020.

Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) are a group of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society which can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees targeting non-traditional and adult learners. The E-SLP project focusses on online, flexible and scalable SLPs in the European context.

This report forms part of work package 5 and was coordinated by The Open University UK.

### 1.1. Partners

- P1 European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
- P2 Fernuniversität in Hagen
- P3 The Open University
- P4 Open Universiteit Nederland
- P5 Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
- P6 Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
- P7 Hellenic Open University
- P8 Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO
- P9 Anadolu University
- P10 Universidade Aberta
- P11 Open University of Cyprus
- P12 Open University of the University of Jyväskylä
- P13 Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
- P14 National Association of Distance Education
- P15 Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislaw Staszica W Krakowie



## 1.2. Content

The following report provides a summary of the approaches to quality assurance within the partner institutions of the E-SLP project, to identify similarities and differences and make recommendations for the quality assurance of SLPs.

## 2. Introduction

Quality assurance instils trust in the quality of HE provisions across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HE) (ENQA), first established in 2000 to “*promote European cooperation in the field of quality assurance in HE*” (ENQA, 2021), provides a mechanism to assure stakeholders of the quality of HE provisions through compliance of its members with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA (ESG, 2015). ESG are not prescriptive in nature but provide a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in HE which cover areas considered fundamental to the delivery of quality provision and learning environments (ESG, 2015). The presence of the ESG helps to instil mutual trust in HE provisions by ensuring “*that the quality assurance agencies in the EHEA adhere to the same set of principles, processes and procedures*” (ESG, 2015 p.8).

In the majority of European countries, higher education institutions (HEIs) are subject to regular external reviews by a delegated quality assurance agency. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is the official register of these agencies listing only those that comply with the ESG. In 2018 EQAR launched the database of external quality assurance results (DEQAR) to enable direct access to the reports of EQAR registered quality assurance agencies for key stakeholders.

To further develop trust in the quality of Short Learning Programmes (SLP)s, the EUNIQ project<sup>1</sup>, which is developing the quality evaluation framework for the European University Alliances should be used

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nvao.net/en/eunig>

as a reference point. The framework could provide a mechanism to support the mutual recognition of SLPs in the EHEA.

The quality assurance of SLPs is fundamental to their recognition and must be considered as a core component of curriculum design. This report documents the approaches to quality assurance across the partner countries and where applicable their associated institutions. The report then presents recommendations for the quality assurance of SLPs to support mutual recognition of SLPs across the EHEA.

Information collated within this report was provided by partners of the ESLP project. For some countries, additional information was gathered through desktop research.

### **3. Country specific quality assurance practices**

#### **3.1 External Quality Assurance**

##### **3.1.1 Belgium**

The quality assurance agency that safeguards the quality of higher education (HE) in the Flemish region of Belgium (Flanders) is the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)<sup>2</sup>.

Since the decree of June 10, 2015, was brought into effect, institutions within Belgium have two options for external quality assurance. Option one is an institutional review that is combined with external quality assessment of the study programme(s). The second option is an expanded institutional review where the institution can have an additional review performed on the way they direct and safeguard their own internal quality review which gives them a reprieve of external quality assessment visitations.

For Flemish Universities and KU Leuven specifically, a clear process takes place which involves the following: development of a critical and future oriented self-evaluation report of a programme; external quality assessment commission composed by the Council of Flemish Universities and Graduate Schools (VLUHR); external visitation including interviews with different stakeholders;

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<sup>2</sup> Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (<https://www.nvao.net/en>)

publication of visitation report which forms the basis for accreditation of a programme. It does not guarantee automatic receipt of accreditation, but it must be requested within the allotted time.

### **3.1.2 Finland**

The quality assurance agency responsible for the evaluation of education in Finland is The Finish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC).

In accordance with the Universities Act, it is a requirement for all Finnish Universities to undertake external evaluation of their activities and quality assurance systems on a regular basis. Fundamental to this quality management is the link between strategic and operational management. FINEEC itself evaluates the quality management system of each HEI in an audit every 6 years. The audits assess how well the quality system meets the strategic and operational management needs of the HEI as well as how comprehensive and effective the quality management of the basic duties is. After passing the audit, the HEI will receive a quality label valid for six years.

### **3.1.3 Germany**

The Accreditation Council (AC) is the overarching body for accreditation and quality assurance within German HE. The AC commissions agencies to conduct quality assurance in order to accredit and re-accredit the study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of HE institutions, and award the seal of the foundation. The award of an accreditation seal is based on filed accreditation reports and through this process, a distinction is drawn between program and system accreditation.

Given that German states have the legal authority over education, the “Study Accreditation Interstate Treaty” (Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag) (2017) mitigates between national and state level and serves as a reference for the states’ higher education laws, while also indirectly establishing the duty for accreditation of bachelor and master study programs.

### **3.1.4 Greece**

In Greece, quality assurance in HE was established for the first time through law 3374/2005 (European Commission, 2021a). In 2005, within the same law, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (ADIP) was established as the body for implementing Quality Assurance in HE. Under law 4653/202, ADIP was renamed as the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) (European Commission, 2021a). The external evaluation and certification committee (EEAP) is appointed by HAHE to assess whether HE academic programmes of study meet the quality criteria for first, second and third cycle curriculum, the quality of the curriculum and the HE institutions (HEIs)

internal quality assurance processes. Following this a certification report is submitted to the Board for Evaluation and Certification of HAHE in order to issue the certification Decision (European Commission, 2021a).

### **3.1.5 Italy**

In Italy, the introduction of the quality assurance system for HE was introduced with law 240/2010 (European Commission, 2021b). In compliance with European orders, this law delegated the Italian government to regulate the quality assurance system. The national agency for quality assurance in Italy is ANVUR.

Operational since 2013, the self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation, Accreditation (AVA) is the name of the Italian HE Quality Assurance system which sets out standards for the self-assessment of HE programmes and institutions, with regards to their internal procedures and the outcomes of their activities. External evaluation is based on peer review, that is carried out by experts appointed by ANVUR through on-site visits and document analysis (European Commission, 2021b).

### **3.1.6 Lithuania**

After establishment of the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in HE the assessment of the quality of studies and research in Lithuanian HE was initiated in 1995 (European Commission, 2021c). A core function of this centre is to organise quality assessment of studies in Lithuanian HEIs. External evaluation of HE programmes is undertaken by the Centre for Quality Assessment in HE or any other HE quality assessment agency included in the European Quality Assurance Register for HE (European Commission, 2021c).

### **3.1.7 Netherlands**

Whilst HEIs are accountable for the quality of the education that they deliver, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the quality of education at system level (European Commission, 2021d). The quality assurance agency that safeguards the quality of HE in the Netherlands is NVAO<sup>3</sup>. The government monitors the quality of education within the accreditation system. Accreditation provides the seal of the government to confirm that the quality of education has been positively assessed by the NVAO. This is achieved on the basis of an independent and expert peer review (European Commission, 2021d). Underpinned by the HE and Research Act (WHW, 1993) the supervision of HE is the responsibility of the Education Inspectorate, under the authority of the

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<sup>3</sup> Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (<https://www.nvao.net/en>)



Minister of Education, Culture and Science (European Commission, 2021d). The Education Inspectorate is responsible for supervising individual institutions as well as the whole HE system, including accreditation through supervision of HEIs compliance with relevant legislation (European Commission, 2021d).

### **3.1.8 Poland**

In Poland external quality assurance is conducted by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) and includes the following key activities:

- Initial programme evaluation which grants authorisation to provide first, second and third cycle programmes in any field of study.
- Periodic programme evaluation, which is a mandatory evaluation of ongoing first, second and third cycle programmes in all fields of study.
- Overall institutional evaluation which covers quality assurance activities within a HEI in all subjects where it offers programmes.

### **3.1.9 Portugal**

In Portugal the HE assessment and accreditation agency (A3ES) was created via Decree-law no. 369/2007 with the core objective to promote and ensure quality HE provision. A3ES nominates external directives to conduct external evaluation of institutions which covers quality assurance activities of a HEI in all domains where it offers programmes and audits of internal systems of quality assurance, upon request of the institution.

### **3.1.10 Spain**

In Spain, the national agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) is an Autonomous Body with the core objective to provide external quality assurance for the Spanish HE System and to contribute to its constant improvement through evaluation, certification and accreditation. ANECA participates in the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) which has agreed a good practice code where 17 quality standards have to be applied to assure the quality of HE provision. In addition to ANECA, Spain has 10 regional quality assurance agencies.

### **3.1.10 Turkey**

In Turkey, The Higher Education Quality Council Turkey (THEQC) is a public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy with the objective of evaluating the quality of HEIs education and research activities in accordance with the national and international quality standards, and coordinating the processes of accreditation, internal and external quality assurance, and authorisation

of independent external evaluation organisations. THEQC primarily performs external evaluation of HEI's and coordinates the authorisation and recognition processes of accreditation agencies to ensure the internalisation and dissemination of a quality assurance culture in HEIs.

### **3.1.12 United Kingdom**

The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of HE in England. The OfS delegates quality assurance responsibility to the QAA to ensure parity of HE provision across the sector.

The QAA work with all Universities and colleges across the UK who deliver HE programmes to assure the quality of the student experience.

For institutions registered with the OfS, the quality of HE provisions across the sector is assured through quality and enhancement reviews (QER) for monitoring and intervention. This provides evidence to the OfS about whether registered providers referred by the OfS to the QAA meet one or more of the Core practices of the UK Quality Code for HE.

## **3.2 Internal Quality Assurance**

### **3.2.1 Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven**

Within KU Leuven, the internal Quality Assurance is called COBRA (Cooperation, Reflection and Action, with attention for Checks & Balances). COBRA has adopted a '2x2 cycle' which means that in a four-year cycle a moment of 'adjustment of preconditions' at faculty and university level is integrated every two years. As part of COBRA a range of stakeholders including external peers, contribute to the quality of education at three levels of the institution (education programme, faculty and institution).

### **3.2.2 Finland: Open University of the University of Jyväskylä**

Each HEI develops its own quality management system (QMS) from its own needs and goals. The QMS is based on The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The QMS of the University requires internal quality audits on a yearly basis. Audits concern a variety of topics one at a time. Additionally, self-evaluations of education, management or organising services are arranged systematically and frequently.

### **3.2.3 Germany: Fernuniversität in Hagen**

The national law requires ongoing quality management systems, which are specified in the individual states' HE laws – owing to the federal structure of Germany and its education system.

At the FernUniversität in Hagen, the overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the Rectorate. It is delegated to the faculties for implementation, which are supported by the administrative unit for accreditation and quality management.

### **3.2.4 Greece: Hellenic Open University**

Within every HEI in Greece, the Quality Assurance Unit (MODIP) is the responsible body for the support and direction of quality assurance processes. MODIP is responsible for the development and organisation of the institution's internal quality assurance system, the direction and support of evaluation processes of academic units and other services in the institution, and support of external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes in cooperation with HAHE. The constitution of each MODIP is under the discretion of each institutions board.

### **3.2.5 Italy: Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO**

As defined by the HE quality assurance system, each university has three key quality assurance actors: the independent evaluation unit (NdV), joint teaching-student committees (CPDS) and the unit responsible for the internal quality assurance system (PQA). All bodies have core responsibilities for the quality assurance of HE provisions within their institution. NdV specifically provides verification of the methodologies used and uniformity of the applied criteria, the CPDS monitors the good functioning of the university's educational activities, and the PQA promotes the culture of Quality in the University and implements the Quality Policy defined by the central bodies of the University

### **3.2.6 Netherlands: Open Universiteit Nederland**

In the Netherlands, whilst the Minister of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for the quality of education at system level, individuals HEIs are responsible for the quality of the education that they provide.

### **3.2.7 Poland: Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawo Staszica W Krakowie**

National legislation currently in force requires HEIs to develop an internal quality assurance system and entrusts the Rector of each HEI with the responsibility for the implementation and enhancement of the system. It does not pre-define in detail its scope or element. Internal quality assurance is considered by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) in their external evaluation and accreditation processes.

### **3.2.8 Portugal: Universidade Aberta**

In Portugal HEIs are responsible for developing internal quality assurance processes which comply with the requirements of the HE assessment and accreditation agency (A3ES) to ensure the overall quality

of the HE and of the study programmes. Detailed arrangements for internal quality assurance are outlined within internal regulations.

### **3.2.9 Spain: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia**

The national agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) is responsible for internal quality assurance processes through implementation of two programs; VERIFICA that evaluates the proposals of new planned studies in accordance with the European Higher Education Area and ACREDITA that evaluates the renewal of the initial accreditation on official titles).

In Spain universities must define their quality assurance policies and have Internal Quality Assurance Systems (SGIC) that have been formally established and are publicly accessible (UNED, no date). UNED specifically has established its Internal Quality Assurance System (SGIC-U) within the framework of ANCEAs audit programme which was certified by ANECA in 2009 within their first call for the AUDIT Program (UNED, no date).

### **3.1.10 Turkey: Anadolu University**

In line with the University's strategic plan and objectives as well as the rules and procedures set by the Higher Education Quality Council in Turkey, "Anadolu University Quality Commission" is responsible for building the internal and external quality assurance system, identifying key performance indicators specific to the institution, assessing the programs and submitting reports on quality assurance to the Senate with a view to evaluating and monitoring education and research activities.

### **3.1.11 United Kingdom: The Open University UK**

UK Universities have responsibility and accountability for developing internal quality assurance processes to meet requirements of the UK Quality Code and to ensure the standard of their provision.

The quality of academic provision at the OUUK is the overall responsibility of the University Senate who delegates responsibility through a hierarchical governance structure.

## **4. Summary of quality assurance practices**

On review of the approaches to quality assurance the following points can be made:

- External Quality Assurance:
  - All countries have a national agency responsible for the external quality assurance of HE provisions.

- Some countries e.g., Spain have multiple bodies who have responsibility for accrediting HE provision. Others e.g., England in the UK, have one overarching regulator (OfS).
- Some countries e.g., UK and Portugal, have a quality code/guideline that identifies the standards of quality provision in HE. It provides transparency to stakeholders involved in HE and supports the internal quality assurance of qualifications.
- Some countries e.g., UK and Finland are subject to external quality reviews/audit checks to monitor the quality of their provision.
- Internal Quality Assurance:
  - All institutions (where appropriate) are accountable for the quality of their own provision and its assurance.
  - The process for quality assuring provision is defined within the governing committees of the HEI.
  - A reliable approach to internal quality assurance exists.

To ensure the quality of HE provision, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide a common Framework for national and institutional quality assurance processes across the EHEA to help build mutual trust, enhance recognition of qualifications and create greater cross-border cooperation<sup>4</sup>. These standards should be fundamental to the design of SLPs. The review provided in this report suggests that all partners can have confidence in each other's quality assurance practices.

## 5. Recommendations

In response to the points raised within this report the following recommendations have been made.

- Short learning programmes should be subject to quality assurance procedures in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- All institutions should have published regulations stating how they quality assure and recognise short learning programmes through their own internal processes.

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<sup>4</sup> ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EQAR, BUSINESSEUROPE and EI (2015). ESG: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Belgium: EURASHE.

- All institutions should have published regulations stating how they recognise prior certificated, non-formal or informal learning within their short learning programmes.
- To aid mutual recognition of SLPs, partner institutions need to commit to trust other institutions internal and external quality assurance processes. This could be achieved through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

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# e)SLP

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