

cEVU

## **REPORT WORKING GROUP 4: QUALITY**

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## 0. Introduction

This working group was intended to evaluate existing quality assurance systems and procedures within conventional (higher) education, to evaluate its applicability within the environment of a European virtual university as the networked collaboration between existing institutions. Therefore, the working group started off with a presentation of the quality assurance models that were at hand in the own universities and discussed a collection of gathered starting documents (see Annex 1). Emphasis was put on quality assurance for e-learning and distance education within higher education, but paid also attention to more business-like systems that are (sometimes) used in conventional education.

The outcome of this review gathered a number of background considerations that have to be taken into account when talking about quality assurance in the framework of a cEVU. Universities are more and more confronted with the necessity of using quality management systems that are grounded in national regulations, and as most conventional universities are dependent on their national government for the financing of their education, they cannot neglect these regulations. Although it can be expected that the basic characteristics of the various quality management systems that are imposed by national government will be alike, differences can not be excluded. Having a joint quality management system for all universities and the central level within a cEVU would therefore be unrealistic. This is the reason why the working group restricted its approach to the service level for the cEVU (other aspects being dealt with through the institutional quality management systems of the partners).

The constraints of the project (time, means) did not allow working out such services quality assurance system. The framework however was designed and directions along with recommendations were given for its development. The collected materials are good starting point to proceed further.

This report is acknowledges Marja Kallonen-Rönkkö, one of the working group members, for making extensively use of the article "Quality Assurance and Virtual University Consortiums" that was prepared by her, and published in the Proceedings of the cEVU Final Conference. ( Marja Kallonen-Rönkkö, *Quality Assurance And Virtual University Consortiums* University of Joensuu, cEVU Conference proceedings 23-25 November 2003)

## 1. Background considerations

### 1.1 Quality assurance systems and academic tradition

Quality assurance systems originated in the business environment where minimal standards of production and services quality were felt be needed in the competitive area

of gaining and maintaining customer satisfaction. The standards and models that were developed (national and international, with the ISO 900x as the best known and regularly updated standards and the EFQM model as the reference model for Europe)<sup>1</sup> are of a generic nature, meaning they should be applicable in the widest possible range of production and services environments. ISO can be characterised as a guideline that “describes a basic set of elements by which quality management systems can be developed and implemented”<sup>2</sup>. The elements are management responsibility, quality system principles, economics, marketing, production etc. The basis of the ISO-series is the customer’s needs and expectations. The total organisation is focused on the customer in order to assure these. In the EFQM system the key tool is the EFQM Excellence Model, a multi-faceted performance measurement system which organisations use to measure strengths in nine key areas using a self-assessment framework and a weighted scoring system. In addition to self-assessment, EFQM values the benefits of sharing good practices by using benchmarking processes. The EFQM Excellence Model is said to be the most widely used organisational framework in Europe.

These systems remain however rather formal, to respond to the variety of business organisations for which they were conceived. An illustration can be found in the following example from the ISO 9001:2000 version on the aspect of control of the quality system<sup>3</sup>:

“5.5.1 Define responsibilities and authorities

- Clarify responsibilities and authorities.
- Communicate responsibilities and authorities.

5.5.2 Appoint management representative

- Oversee your quality management system.
- Report on the status of your quality management system.
- Support the improvement of your quality management system.

5.5.3 Support internal communications

- Ensure that internal communication processes are established.
- Ensure that communication occurs throughout the organization.”

With some exaggeration, one could state that ISO provides a checklist of formal criteria, which could be applied to education, but omit the intrinsic quality of lectured content and academic culture.

cEVU aimed primarily at conventional universities. As also said in reports of other working groups, conventional universities have an academic tradition of autonomy of the university in deciding what is programmed within the various curricula, as well as a large autonomous responsibility of teachers on content of lectured subjects, used educational methods and evaluation criteria. By consequence, university and staff were often reluctant, especially in old and well-settled institutions, to accept external control that could dispute the quality of the offered education; on the contrary, the fact that the education is offered by esteemed institutions was considered as a guarantee for quality in itself. However, things are gradually changing and external evaluation is being

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<sup>1</sup> For website references, see Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> AECS. *Quality Guide*, Association of European Correspondence Schools.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.praxiom.com/iso-9001.htm>

introduced, based on peer review (taken over from research evaluation in editorial boards) and site visits prepared by internal self-study.

## 1.2 Quality assurance and e-learning

Of course attempts have been made to develop quality assurance systems for education, or even more specific for distance education and even e-learning (for references see Annex 1). The European Commission, through its funding programmes Comett II (e.g. the EQUAL methodology<sup>4</sup> based on the IBM grey books for quality of training), and later Leonardo and Socrates (e.g. Caliber-Net<sup>5</sup>) has stimulated the development of such systems or methodologies for analysis and maintenance of quality (e.g. MECA-ODL<sup>6</sup>), but many of them remained unfinished within the project time and got not implemented in the large educational environment where they were intended for. Also national bodies developed handbooks and/or guides like the British Quality Assurance Agency's Handbook for Academic Review<sup>7</sup> and its Distance Learning Guidelines<sup>8</sup> or the Norwegian Association of Distance Education's Quality Standards. Opposite to its name, NADE's quality standards provide, like QAA's Distance Learning Guidelines a reference framework for institutions that want to develop quality of distance education. These reference works are very useful, but restrict themselves to the level of (higher) education institutions as providers of education, leaving the aspects of quality assurance in a collaborative network for virtual education untouched.

One of the essential characteristics of the Education of learning environment of e-learning is its inclusion of electronic learning materials and tools for learning and instruction. Because of this, usability is an important element of the quality assurance of the virtual learning. In on-line instruction like in the use of earlier digital learning material a lot of usability problems have been met (Kallonen-Rönkkö 1994; 2002; Santhanam, Ballantyne, Mulligan, de la Harpe & Ellis 2000 etc.)<sup>9</sup> Even the simplest system can lead to troubles for the people using it if not designed with usability in mind.

## 1.3 Quality assurance and the Bologna process

In the Bologna Agreement 1999<sup>10</sup>, one of the core areas dealt with the "promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance, with a view to developing comparable criteria

<sup>4</sup> DE POTTER, P. (1993) *The EQUAL quality system*. SKILLTEAM Management Consultants, Document produced in the framework of the EQUAL project, December 31, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.caliber-net.odl.org/htdocs/outcomes/guide>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.adeit.uv.es/mecaodl/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/acrevhbook/contents.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/dlg/guidelin.htm>

<sup>9</sup> KALLONEN-RÖNKKÖ, M. 1994. Tietokoneavusteinen opetus peruskoulun ala-asteen oppimisympäristönä. Osa II. Tietokoneavusteiset opetusohjelmat. Oulun yliopisto. Kajaanin opettajankoulutuslaitoksen julkaisuja. Sarja A: *Tutkimuksia* 5.

SANTHANAM, E., BALLANTYNE, C., MULLIGAN, D., DE LA HARPE, B. & ELLIS, R. (2000). *Student questionnaires and teaching evaluation: Cutting the cloth to fit the purpose*. Retrieved July 2, 2003, from Murdoch University Web site:

<http://cleo.murdoch.edu.au/evaluation/pubs/confs/santhanam2.html>

<sup>10</sup> BOLOGNA AGREEMENT (1999) *The European higher education area. Joint declaration of the European ministers of education convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999*.

and methodologies”. The goal is to develop comparable criteria and methodologies. According to the Berlin communiqué 2003<sup>11</sup>, the quality of higher education has proven to be in the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers responsible for higher education commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They also lay emphasis on the principle of institutional autonomy: “The primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.” According to the Berlin communiqué, by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include among other things:

- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and publication of the results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures. International participation, co-operation and networking.

The goal is to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005.

Concerning higher education, the e-learning dimension included, quality assurance is considered to be the essential method through which instruction can be developed. Anyhow, in spite of this unanimity there exists large-scale disagreement on the desirable characteristics of the quality assurance systems. It could be assumed that the problems are most wide-ranging in the international networks and consortiums of universities where many different institutional and national models, expectations and cultural differences meet each other.

In line with the Bologna directives, the Association of European Universities CRE<sup>12</sup> launched in 2000 a project with the support of the European Commission to explore the context and the feasibility of accreditation across national borders in Europe. The main motivation of the project was to contribute to the clarification of the key concepts and issues related to this topic, as well as to the discussion of possible collaborative accreditation schemes in Europe.

CRE formulated five principles for accreditation:

- create space for European convergence while preserving diversity in traditions and culture and respect for national competencies
- preserve institutional diversity
- establish appropriate balance between external accountability and institutional autonomy

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<sup>11</sup> BERLIN COMMUNIQUÉ (2003) *Communiqué of the conference of ministers responsible for higher education in Berlin on the 19th September 2003*.

<sup>12</sup> CRE (2001) *Towards accreditation schemes for higher education in Europe*, Final project report. (<http://www.unige.ch/eua/>)

- be flexible and capable of adapting to on-going international changes
- add value to current quality assurance systems while preserving their improvement function

#### 1.4 Quality assurance in an institutional context

Quality assurance systems that were developed for the members of educational associations (like the NADE's one and the somewhat older Quality Systems guides of the European Association of Corresponding Schools – AECS – the European association of distance teaching universities, industry and commerce SATURN, or the European Federation of National Engineering Associations <sup>13</sup>) found their inspiration in the ISO and/or the EFQM systems.

Instead of applying these guidelines of their associations, higher education institutions turned and turn sometimes radical towards the ISO system; especially those institutions that target the market of continuing professional development, as they experience that ISO certified companies are more likely to choose for outsourcing their training to education and training organisations that are ISO certified themselves.

Other institutions develop their own model for quality assurance, as the ISO and EFQM systems respond not fully to the universities' needs and culture. For an example of an institution quality assurance system, see Annex 2. In most of the quality systems developed at the institutional level feedback gathered from students has an important role when the quality of institution is estimated and activities for improvement of the quality are planned and executed. But also other methods like self-assessment, peer-to-peer estimation, experts' or evaluation organisations' external estimation, audit procedures and benchmarking are used. In benchmarking the aim is to recognise the bad and good practices in one's own organisation and to obtain knowledge on the good practices developed in other organisations participating in the benchmarking process<sup>14</sup>.

Conventional higher education institutions become gradually "blended", meaning that e-learning and traditional teaching get more and more integrated. A quality assurance system for use in conventional higher education needs consequently applicable to both the traditional and the technology based or supported learning (and teaching) environment.

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<sup>13</sup> AECS (1994) *Quality Guide*

SATURN (1992) *SATURN Guide: distance learning for training*

FEANI (1995) *AQUAFORCE – Assurance of Quality in Continuing Education, a Handbook* (in the framework of a Comett II project)

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. the Benchmarking system that was developed and published in 2002 by the BENVIC project (Socrates) as an example of BENCHMARKING VIRTUAL Campusses (including the ones of conventional higher education institutions) <http://www.benvic.odl.org/indexpr.html>

## **2. cEVU: a proposal for a two-level model of quality assurance**

### **2.1 cEVU's network functions**

The collaborative European Virtual University, as aimed at in the cEVU project can be briefly described as a strategic alliance (network) of institutions that are similar in level and nature. The network's objectives are exchange / sharing and joint development of studying materials, courses and programmes. The institutions would be bound by a consortium agreement, the basis for that being mutual trusts. The consortium would have a limited central support unit and central services that could partly be distributed services from and to partner institutions. The cEVU members are (mainly) conventional universities with the academic tradition of autonomy of the university and of the teachers and with rich research tradition. e-Learning and the use of ICT in education are generally seen as tools that provide added value to the traditional instruction methods by stimulating and supporting (independent) learning of the traditional student, by extending the educational offer with distance learning courses (including "virtual" courses and modules of partner universities) and by creating joint programmes and courses at the various levels of education (undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education). e-Learning is in other words not considered as a specific, separate method of the instruction, but an integral part of the instructional and learning blend. More details on the concept of such cEVU can be found in the reports of the working groups, especially the one on policies.

It may be clear from what is said that this cEVU has not the same function as its constituting educational institutions; it is not an educational institution that lays as an umbrella over the partner institutions and many components and functions of institutional quality management systems are not or only in a limited way relevant for the cEVU level. On the other hand, the cEVU structure pays services to the partner institutions, which are not in place at the level of the separate institutions, and these services need their own quality assurance provision. The central level should however be able to build on a basic quality at the partners' side: the principle of mutual trust that binds the partners in the consortium agreement implies that each partner ensures a certain level of quality. These considerations have led to a proposal for a two-level model of quality assurance.

### **2.2 The two-level model**

#### ***2.2.1 Institutional level***

cEVU's quality approach is based on the assumption that partners (already have to) work with a quality management system. According to the Berlin communiqué, by 2005 all the countries participating in the Bologna process should have national internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education. Whether these "national" systems will allow room for inter-institutional differences within each country or will follow internationally convergent systems cannot yet be predicted. In international consortiums the quality assurance systems of member institutions may therefore differ from each

other, but should not block the possibility for partners to co-operate on the basis of mutual trust (especially with regard to mutual recognition of programmes, courses and modules). Moreover, it may be recommended that partners join a regular benchmarking exercise and use its outcomes to learn from each other and improve the own practices like suggested by the already mentioned BENVIC approach.

### ***2.2.2 Consortium level***

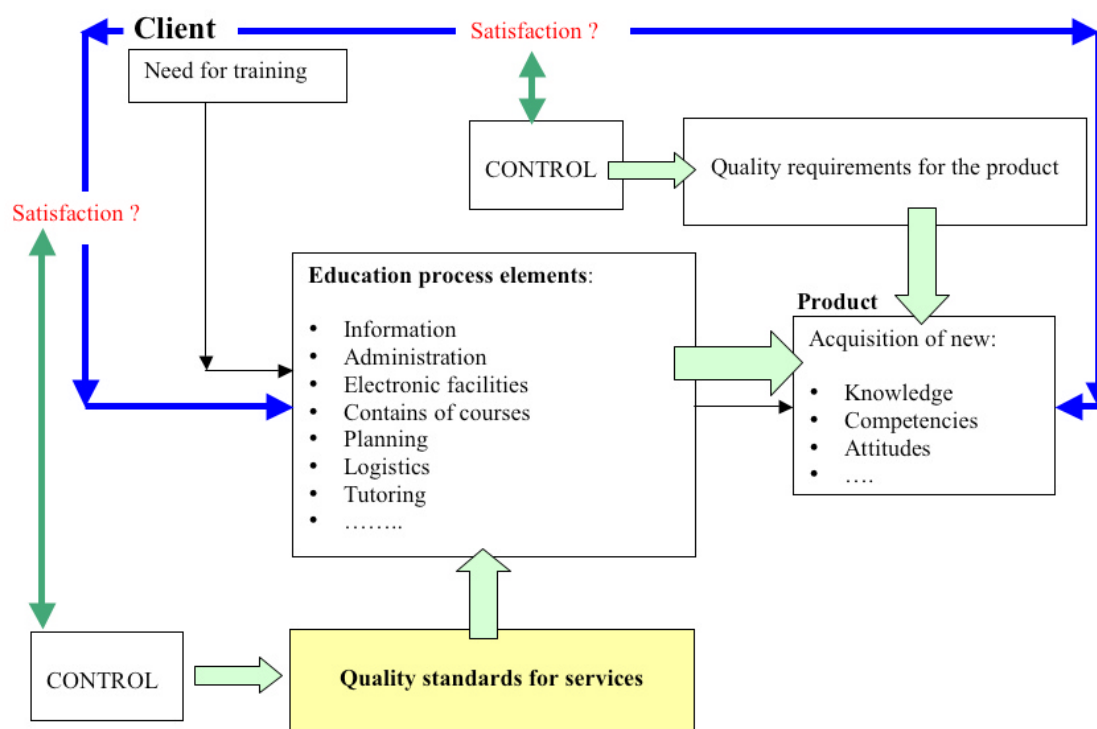
As it is understood that partners within a cEVU are using an own quality management system (eventually according national directives) and the cEVU itself focuses on services, the quality working group recommends joint (minimal) quality standards and quality assurance procedures for establishment of a common quality level only on services: a Services Quality Standards (SQS). Opposite to most business situation where the provider produces and/or delivers a product or service, education is fundamentally a co-production activity: certainly in the perspective of constructivism as the today's leading learning theory, the learner is in control of the own learning, and the teacher is a supporter who facilitates this learning process. In business terms: the client is a producer of his own product, which imply that quality of the education product is function of the quality of the support services as provided by the teacher, as well as in the quality of the production process (the learning process) conducted by the learner.

The quality of the learning end product and support services are on their turn dependent of the institutional infrastructure. Hannafin divides the institutional infrastructure into four areas: pedagogical, technological, support and policy/budget<sup>15</sup>. Institutions have normally developed this infrastructure according to their own needs and requirements, but in the collaboration environment of a cEVU universities have to make explicit and share the quality standards concerning infrastructure with partner universities.

Services Quality Standards are therefore to be situated in the larger framework of quality assurance as shown in the following figure.

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<sup>15</sup> HANNAFIN. K. (2002) *A decision support tool (DST) for advanced distributed distance learning (ADDL)*, In *Advancing virtual university education*, University of Joensuu, Bulletins of Educational Technology Centre 1, 93-111.

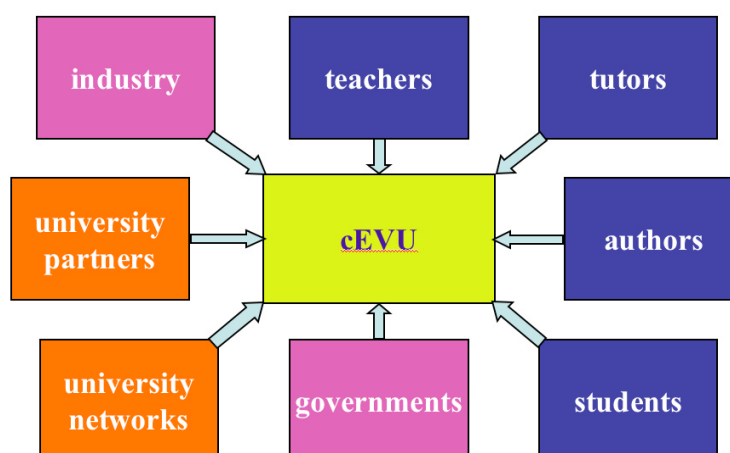


*Quality assurance framework*

Such SQS are not in place yet for a cEVU. They will become very important because of the ongoing integration of e-learning in activities of existing co-operation frameworks (Erasmus programme, Bologna process) and providing the e-learning dimension to their operational tools (ECTS, European Masters; quality assurance; mobility); an evolution that is characterised as a priority in the e-learning programme proposal of the European Commission<sup>16</sup>. The development of this SQS could, according to the working group, follow the following lines.

Step 1. Identification of cEVU stakeholders and identification of stakeholders' needs. Stakeholders are not only "consumers" of the services, but are all actors that contribute to the success of cEVU. They must be identified according to the strategy and policies of the cEVU and the objectives of the cEVU must be defined in function of their needs. An overview of the stakeholders is represented in the next figure.

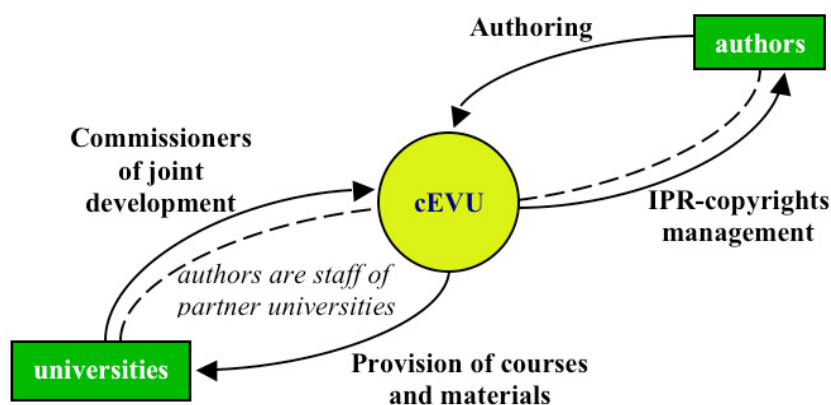
<sup>16</sup> COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (2002) *Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL adopting a multi-annual programme (2004-2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme)*. Presented by the Commission Brussels 19.12.2002



*Overview of the cEVU stakeholders*

### Step 2: Identification of all functions

The next step exists in the identification of all relevant functional relations that may exist between stakeholders (actors). Take as an example of such relations the situation of joint course development. On demand of (a number of) partner universities, the central governance of the cEVU decides on the development of a joint course. A course team is composed, in which teachers-experts as well as pedagogical, technological and media specialists of the partner universities join efforts to develop the contents along with teaching and learning materials in formats that are fit for e-learning in a cEVU environment. The relations between the cEVU, the authors and the universities can be depicted as follows:



*Functional relations between various actors in the framework of joint course development*

### Step 3: Development of SQS itself

A quality standard can be defined as an unambiguous (in terms of objectives and facts) and measurable description of the basic level of performance, delivered to “clients” (users) to satisfy their needs. As such they permit to harmonise similar

performances (products, services), may serve as guides to perform up to the level of satisfaction, but also as criterion for (eventually auto-) evaluation of quality.

Step 3 will define the quality standards for all services that are embedded in the functional relations between the stakeholders. As such, these standards are based on the outcomes of the two earlier steps; but inspiration can of course be found as well in quality systems that have been developed earlier. Examples of such quality standards can be found in the already mentioned NADE Quality Guide, which follow a similar philosophy for developing quality, and in the MANFORME project, initiated by the Tunisian Ministry of Education and Training, of which one such standard is worked out by a working group member (see Annex 3). Also benchmarking studies in the field of e-learning are useful foundations for the development work, for instance the study made by Institute for Higher Education Policy (2000)<sup>17</sup>. The research identified 24 benchmarks, which are considered essential to ensure excellence in the institutions participating in the study.

The quality working group would like to emphasise that the quality system is required to function well as a tool in improvement of instruction. This requires an evaluation system, of which the use of feedback data has to be already taken into consideration when developing the SQS.

#### Step 4: Design of an evaluation system as basis for continuous improvement

The last stage is building the evaluation system and its feedback channels. Such evaluation system could also lead to a quality label that can be promoted and would contribute to the “brand” of cEVU (see also the report of the working group on business plan).

### 3. Conclusion and recommendations

cEVU’s quality approach can be restricted to the services that it provides to its stakeholders, under the condition that each partner is using a quality management system will probably be linked to a national accreditation and quality assurance system as foreseen in the Bologna (Berlin) implementation process.

It is recommended that these national quality assurance systems (and the accreditation procedures) would be sufficiently convergent to have their outcomes accepted throughout Europe by all institutions. Common frameworks like the ones under consideration and development in the eLearning projects (such as SEEQUEL, QUAL-E-LEARNING, EQO and SEEL) could simplify this acceptance and recognition; however, within cEVU the use of a quality assurance system by partners should be part of the requirements that are

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<sup>17</sup> INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY (2000) *Quality on the line, Benchmarks for success in internet-based distance education*, USA: Blackboard & National Education Association. <http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Quality.pdf>

put onto the partners in a consortium agreement. Once taken up in the consortium agreement, it would also contribute to make cEVU an open consortium.

The quality assurance that has to be developed at the central level of cEVU can than be restricted to operational services quality standards. A framework for these SQSs has been developed, but it is important to consider that SQSs aimed to support education must take the educational infrastructure into account. As critical issues should be mentioned:

- accreditation
  - attention to be paid to the conditions for acceptance of new partners (consortium agreement)
  - (mutual) recognition of courses and programmes
  - acceptance of credits: use of ECTS plus, TUNING approach (competences) and openness for recognition of professional experience (working group on accreditation)
- pedagogical models
  - consensus about educational options, connected functions and variables (working group on pedagogy)
- digital platforms
  - consensus about necessary functionalities and interoperability (working group on digital platforms)

Finally, the quality assurance system must have an evaluation procedure with feedback to both the central and the institutional levels of cEVU. Only then a quality label, useful for branding (working group on business plan) can be developed and accepted.

## Annex 1. Starting documents

On quality assurance in general:

ISO 9001:2000

- <http://www.praxiom.com/iso-9001.htm>
- <http://www.praxiom.com/iso-9001-b.htm>

EQFM

- [http://www.efqm.org/model\\_awards/model/excellence\\_model.htm](http://www.efqm.org/model_awards/model/excellence_model.htm)
- [http://www.efqm.org/model\\_awards/model/MODEL\\_2003.htm](http://www.efqm.org/model_awards/model/MODEL_2003.htm)

Webpage that relates the ISO 9000 standards to the quality in education

(<http://www.nuffic.nl/do/ict/sugg.html>)

Policy paper on quality assurance in universities (EUA)

([http://www.unige.ch/eua/En/Activities/Institutional\\_Review\\_Programme/QA/QApolycypaper-EUA.pdf](http://www.unige.ch/eua/En/Activities/Institutional_Review_Programme/QA/QApolycypaper-EUA.pdf))

Quality assurance guidelines, standards, processes:

- <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/dlg/guidelin.htm>
- <http://www.liceftelug.quebec.ca/fr/pdf/CanREGs%20Eng.pdf>
- Quality e-Learning Quality Standards of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities  
(<http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/elearningdevelopmentrfrp/MnSCU%20Quality%20Standards.html>)
- External Quality Assurance Processes (Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit University of Central Lancashire)  
(<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/quality/eqap/index.htm>)
- Internal Quality Assurance Processes  
(<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/quality/iqap/index.htm>)
- Document that describes various systems (see attachment Quality guide description.doc)

Quality assurance models

- <http://campus.leeds.ac.uk/FlexibleLearning/Main/quala.htm>
- The Concord Consortium e-Learning: Model for Online Courses  
([http://www.concord.org/courses/cc\\_e-learning\\_model.pdf](http://www.concord.org/courses/cc_e-learning_model.pdf))

Assessing and benchmarking quality in e-learning/ODL

- The part " 20 questions to assess quality" In: Assessing the quality of materials-based teaching and learning (<http://www-iet.open.ac.uk/pp/D.G.F.Rowntree/assessMBL.html>)
- <http://www.ihep.com/quality.pdf>
- [http://www.benvic.odl.org/16\\_02\\_tot.pdf](http://www.benvic.odl.org/16_02_tot.pdf) (very large file !!)

NADE (1996<sup>2</sup>). Quality Standards  
<http://www.nettskolen.com/pub/artikkel.xsql?artid=122>) and its more recent revision  
(2001 - only in Norwegian): Kvalitetsnormer for Fjernundervisning  
Alan Tait, Open University UK (1997 'Quality Assurance in Distance Education:  
International Case Studies', Editor Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver

## **Annex 2. QVIS (Quality in Virtual Instruction System), in development at the University of Joensuu**

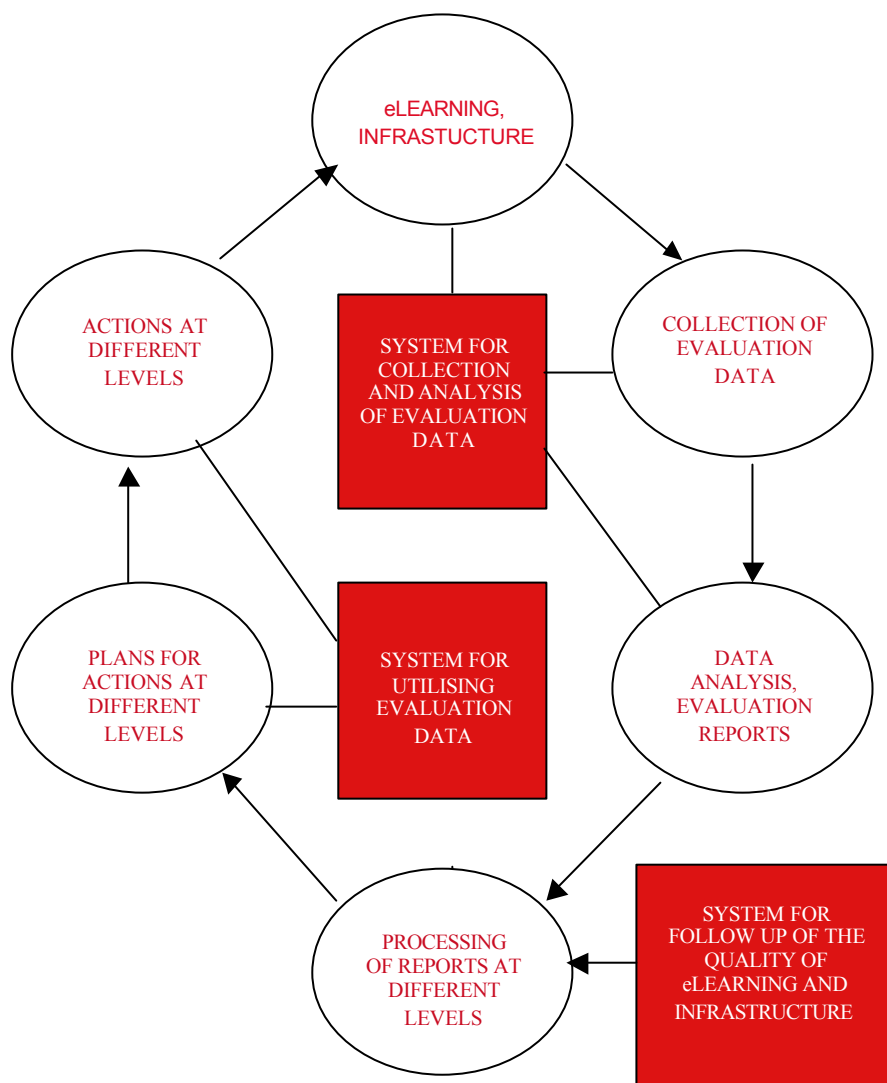
Prof. Marja Kallonen-Rönkkö, University of Joensuu

### **The Idea of the Quality System QVIS**

The development of the quality system QVIS (the Quality in Virtual Instruction System) was started at the University of Joensuu in order to estimate the quality of virtual instruction. The QVIS is grounded on the basis described above. In addition to take advantage of the existing quality systems and experiences on them, we wanted to take advantage of the possibilities of ICT and web-based tools in the development of the quality system.

The quality system QVIS consists of three subsystems (see picture below):

1. A system for gathering and processing the evaluation data
2. A system for utilizing the evaluation data
3. A system for follow up of the quality



*The QVIS system*

The first subsystem includes the methods to be used in the collection of evaluation data and in the analysis of it. Both the evaluation system and reporting are developed in cooperation with the user groups. From the point of view of those who evaluate the quality of instruction, it is essential that they feel they are evaluating the fundamental quality elements of instruction and that they feel their feedback is used in the development of instruction. When the quality of instruction is seen as a task for the whole organization, common evaluation methods have to be adopted. (Santhanam & al. 2000). A common evaluation method must also contain the possibility for an individual instructor to add criteria for his/her own use. We will in the QVIS connect common

methods of the university and the possibility also to gather feedback according the special needs of the user groups.

The second subsystem concentrates on how information concerning evaluation of instruction can be utilized in an organization. Considering the utilization of the data, it is of utmost importance that the connections to the interest groups are maintained at all developmental phases of the quality system. It is also important to support the utilization of the feedback by recognizing relevant opportunities to use it and by recognizing the routines, developed earlier by the community, with which the use of the feedback can be meaningfully connected. An essential part in the function of the quality system of instruction is to report on where and how feedback has been used and which measures have been taken in the community as a result of feedback. The QVIS will offer database and other tools needed for this.

The third part of the system is the continuity in the gathering of quality data and the comparison of measurements in succession. Results of comparisons will be the criterion for evaluating the quality improvement.

So far we have mostly been working on the first subsystem. The following chapters will give a summary of the work done and of our plans for the future. We have been developing two kinds of methods for data collection and analysis: methods for gathering feedback on instruction from students and instructors and methods for usability research of on-line learning material.

### **The development of the methods for collection and analysis of feedback data**

Methods have been developed for collection and analysis of feedback from students and teachers working on the on-line courses. The feedback is gathered using digital evaluation forms after the course. The forms include evaluation criteria on the following four components:

- Learning material: course content and assignments
- Tools of the learning environment: tools (for students and instructors) included or added in the digital platform
- Tutoring: written advice, teacher's guidance, guidance and stimulus from other students
- Arrangements for instruction: sizing of study modules, schedules, techniques, modes of working, technical tools and their workability.

The digital platforms are said to consist of three basic components: space for learning material, tools for interaction and tools supporting the analysis of information in learning (Korpi, Niemi, Ovaskainen, Siekkinen & Junttila 2000). When speaking about virtual environments, e-learning or on-line courses further components are needed. In addition to these three components, the tools needed by the teachers in tutoring, the tutoring itself and the arrangements for instruction were also included. In the evaluation these components we integrated as above into four components. When developing the

evaluation form the evaluation criteria and forms developed earlier, were made use of (DoIT; IDDL; MiMe; Seymour 1997; Whittington 2000 etc.).

### **Development of the Evaluation System by using Case Studies**

The first version of the evaluation form was developed in cooperation with students and teachers by using case study (Kallonen-Rönkkö 2002). The evaluation form developed was modified after the case study further to be suitable for quality evaluation on different on-line courses. The essential task in the case study phase was to recognize the students' own criteria for the quality of instruction.

In the case study the didactics course of education was carried out at the University of Joensuu by using virtual instruction, besides the initial information session. Instruction was given both to students who had pedagogy as their main or secondary subject and to students of the Open University (f=52). I prepared the learning material and was the teacher of this course, so I could collect all the feedback needed from the students during the course. Learning material was divided into modules with their assignments for learning and for self-evaluation. Two weeks were assigned for studying each theme. Simultaneously, the discussing groups for the themes were open for discussions.

For the quality evaluation on each module I prepared the digital evaluation forms. The students' experiences on the earlier-mentioned components of e-learning were inquired. Besides, at the end of the course a comprehensive evaluation form was introduced. The quality evaluation of the components took place by using the Likert-scale (1-5), except the arrangements of the instruction were evaluated using the nominal scale. Additionally, all forms contained a lot of open-ended questions, which the students answered using their own words. In these questions the students were asked, among other things, to identify the items in each component that were of the best and of the weakest quality.

The answers to open-ended questions were dealt with content analysis. The material received from the discussion groups and from e-mail messages was also analysed by using content analysis. Through the detailed analysis of the feedback spontaneously written by the students I tried to recognize those components of quality that the students used in their own judgements on the quality of instruction, but the results of the analysis did add only a small amount of essential data to the data collected through rating scales of evaluation forms. It seems that the anticipation of the students' quality criteria of instruction was fairly successful when constructing before the case study the form and the rating scales used in the forms.

The digital form with its rating scales, designed for this case study, was examined and complemented to correspond the quality criteria of the students. The criteria included in the evaluation form after that process are presented in the table 1. Evaluation form to be used by instructors was based on the form developed together with students (Ushanov 2002).

Table 1. The quality evaluation criteria in the digital evaluation form

| <u>Learning Material</u>                                     | <u>Usability of Tools in Environment</u> | <u>Tutoring</u>                           | <u>Arrangements for Instruction</u> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| clarity of the goals                                         | synchronous discussion groups            | written directions for the on-line course | supplementary readings              |
| congruence between the goals and content                     | asynchronous discussion groups           | written directions for the tools          | duration of the theme               |
| organization of the material                                 | calendar, e-mail                         | information sessions                      | size of the theme                   |
| integration with earlier knowledge and needs for information | tool for making notes                    | teacher's feedback and guidance           |                                     |
| relevance of learning assignments                            | return box for assignments               | teacher's guidance in discussion groups   |                                     |
| supplementary readings                                       | self-evaluation                          | other students                            |                                     |
| relevance of self-evaluation                                 | tools in general                         |                                           |                                     |
| assignments as feedback on one's own learning                |                                          |                                           |                                     |
| requirements of the material and assignments                 | navigation                               |                                           |                                     |
| offer of choice and alternatives in studying                 |                                          |                                           |                                     |
| role of independence in information gathering in studying    |                                          |                                           |                                     |
| attraction of course content                                 |                                          |                                           |                                     |

On the basis of the information collected through the rating scales we created a quality profile, which gave a general picture of the quality of the course with its successfully or less successfully implemented components. In general the feedback from students was favourable. In the comprehensive evaluation form the students could answer the question what would be the most suitable method for this course. The students chose e-learning. Although the students met problems during the course, enthusiasm towards this method of learning had been awakened.

*“After the initial difficulties, learning on-line begins to feel really fine and interesting for a change. I am still satisfied with this method of working. I haven't got much interest to go and listen to lectures after this!!!”*

But also weak points in the components of the course quality could be identified. Students had a lot of problems with the usability of the tools in the platform used.

*“It was very complicated to send study assignments (even my husband, who is an ADP engineer, was wondering about it)...”*

Other technical problems during the course were usual also. Hara & Kling (2000) and Mason & Weller (2000) discovered in their researches that the technical problems were

usual and they form one of the essential factors that frustrated students in virtual instruction. In quality assurance a special attention must be focused on the usability questions.

The course was implemented again during the next term without there being time to improve it on the basis of the collected student feedback. In the evaluation of the course the same forms were also used. Another person was the instructor of the study module. The students of this module evaluated the learning environment in a very similar way as the students who participated in the case study. As a matter of fact, differences came up only in the evaluation of the tutoring and communication.

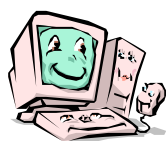
### **Development of the Evaluation System by using Pilot Studies**

After the case study phase the evaluation form was revised for further use in pilot studies. Also the analysis system was developed for the pilot studies. In the QVIS the analysis of feedback and reporting on it is automated. After the form has been submitted the data is transmitted into the database. The system analyses the data. The feedback is processed statistically. In the report you can see the frequency distributions and means of the criteria and the feedback that is written in words. The system updates the report from the course automatically when new data is added. So the reports are always real-time. There aren't any limitations on the number of the students or instructors.

During the spring term 2003 this system has been in voluntary use in all on line courses of the university. Students and teachers have access to the digital forms via the portal of the Virtual Campus of the University of Joensuu. The teachers automatically receive the reports on their on-line courses via the same portal. The structure for reports to other user groups will be developed according to the practices that will be taken into use in connection with the quality system for all instruction in the University.

For further development of the QVIS, a supplementary method has been designed for collection of feedback during the instruction process. Icons for positive and negative feedback will be placed into the digital platform. Students and teachers giving feedback click at the icon of his/her choice and a page will open. In the window, using a drop-down menu, he/she classifies the environment's component that his/her quality evaluation deals with. After this the student or the teacher writes his/her observations in the given answering space.

1. Click



or



2. Choose the area of your feedback from the list

|                |                                                                                   |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| course content |  |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

3. Tell it briefly

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

### *Tools for Quality Evaluation during the Learning Process*

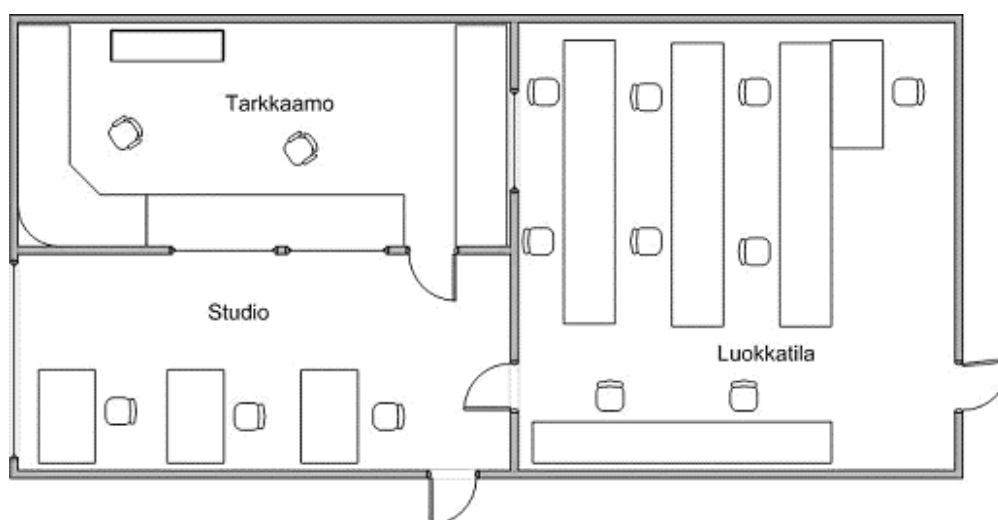
The database including the criteria used in the evaluation form is revised also during the spring term in 2003. This was made in order to make possible the versatility needed in the composition of evaluation form so different user groups can add their own criteria into the form. If they want they can include more criteria or eject one or more criteria from the form, except those that are always included. It's possible to include new criteria in the evaluation. At present, there aren't any limitations on the number of the criteria.

These new tools and features will be taken into use in pilot studies during the autumn term in 2003. In order to make possible the use of the system during international on-line courses a translation into English has also been done. We are using the feedback system for example in the HEAL project (Higher education E-learning courses Assessment and Labelling). In HEAL project, belonging to the eLearning programme of the EU, the aim is like in the cEVU project (collaborative European Virtual University) to develop and pilot tools for the virtual mobility in Europe and quality assurance in virtual instruction.

### **The development of the methods and tools for usability research**

Usability research is an important part in the quality assurance of the on-line courses. The main methods in our usability research of on-line courses are heuristic analysis made by experts and user tests (students and teachers as participators) made in the usability laboratory. In this kind of evaluation the teachers and students are usually not really executing the whole course, they are getting only a limited, but adequate enough view of the course in order to grade it according to the usability criteria and tell their opinions about the procedures of the courses. Usability research is generally used during the production phase of on-line courses or in the case when the course feedback has not been satisfactory.

The usability research on on-line courses will be an important sector in the usability research of our Research laboratory for virtual environments. The adaptation of the usability research methods into the research of learning materials and learning environments in e-learning is under way. User tests are made in the usability laboratory where shooting saves the working situations of students and teachers. The processes can be analysed carefully afterwards.



*Research laboratory for virtual environments (Tarkkaamo = Control room, studio, ADP classroom = luokkatila, the analysis unit is missing from the picture)*

The system developed for collection and analysis of feedback will be adopted in the analysis of video material shot in the laboratory, too. The plan is also to work out different versions for usability evaluation of the materials to be used by researchers and learning material designers, teachers and students.

### **After the pilot studies**

After testing of the QVIS during the year 2003, the evaluation form and the composition of reports to teachers will be revised according to the experiences during the testing phase. The University of Joensuu will develop and take into use a quality system for all the instruction in the university. The system will be integrated with the QVIS and use its tools. This will cause later some need for revision, too. The composition of the reports on on-line courses for other user groups except teachers can be worked out only after the decisions on the compositions of reports on all instruction.

The evaluation of the quality of instruction must give the various interest groups the information they need for their activities. Designers of virtual instruction, designers of on-line courses and teachers working on courses require as detailed observations and evaluations as possible, e.g. in such a way that the defects of the learning material and guidance can be located as exactly as possible. Students need evaluation data on virtual

courses when they are choosing courses. Departments and faculties need a general picture of the quality of their individual courses and, in general, of the quality and possible weaknesses of virtual instruction they offer, in order to improve it. At university level the quality and quantity of virtual instruction in different departments and faculties is interesting not the strong and weak points of individual courses.

The importance of quality is not limited inside the boundaries of one country owing to internationality in instruction, virtual mobility and mobility of labour. The integration of e-learning with “existing co-operation frameworks (Erasmus programme, Bologna process) and ... providing an e-learning dimension to their operational tools (ECTS, European Masters; quality assurance; mobility)” is one of the priorities in the e-learning of the Commission of the European Communities (2002, 11; Opetusministeriö 2001).

So far the first subsystem has limited almost entirely on e-learning. When we are thinking about the activities of an eCampus there is a lot of other activities except instruction that are important to the quality of instruction. These prerequisites of e-learning can be called infrastructure. Hannafin (2002) divides the institutional infrastructure into four areas: pedagogical, technological, support and policy/budget. Some parts of these are included in our form (arrangements for instruction). Anyhow, the evaluation on infrastructure is very limited in the evaluation system at present. In order to gather evaluation data on infrastructure we need to get information also from the groups working with the support and development of the infrastructure at the university. Our aim is to include methods for this into the first subsystem. Quality systems developed earlier and evaluation studies, especially benchmarking studies will lay the foundations to this development work.

The aim for collection of evaluation data on e-learning and its infrastructure is to identify the points that need improvement. The improvement strategies will be based on the evaluation data. A possible method to advance from the evaluation to the improvement strategies is to integrate the data with processes according the model used in the EQUAL (European Quality Label) that is a quality assurance system for development and maintenance of continuing education courses in the field of advanced technology. EQUAL (1993) divides the development of a course into six phases and each of these into sub phases or processes. For each of the 23 processes the purpose, tasks, outputs and quality criteria are determined in the system. A rough summary of the system is presented in the table 2.

Table 2. The development of a course in the Quality assurance system EQUAL

| Phases   | Processes                                                                      | Outputs                                |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Analysis | Justify the requirements<br>Organise the analysis<br>Define the course purpose | Need analysis report<br>Course purpose |

|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Design      | Create course objectives<br>Outline the evaluation strategy<br>Unify learners profiles and adult learning principles<br>Revalidate the delivery system<br>Sequence the lessons<br>Examine the course elements                                                                                                                                           | Course description                                                                                                                   |
| Development | Line up enabling objectives (of each lesson)<br>Establish learning activities<br>Select and develop measurement tools<br>Select media and materials                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Instruction guide<br>Materials and media specifications                                                                              |
| Production  | Plan production<br>Assemble media and materials<br>Copy course materials<br>Catalogue the materials                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Produced course materials and media,<br>Course maintenance plan                                                                      |
| Delivery    | Communicate the course<br>Individualise lessons<br>Facilitate learning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | The delivered course<br>(the actual running of the course)                                                                           |
| Evaluation  | Gather data for evaluation levels 1 through 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learners reactions</li> <li>2. Knowledge, skills and attitude gains</li> <li>3. Applications (Performance of the current work environment</li> <li>4. Business results (organisational benefits)</li> </ul> Analyse those data<br>Report impact and adjustments | Information about how the needs and requirements were met with the course,<br>Evaluation results to all involved,<br>Adjusted course |

The system for the follow up is under construction. The first version of the system will be ready to be taken into use in the beginning of the year 2004. The courses evaluated during the pilot studies will be evaluated second time during the year 2004. Evaluation data on the quality of instruction from different terms and years from our own university and from the different universities, having virtual student exchange with us, will be the criterion that helps to evaluate the profitability and efficiency of activities and measures to be taken for the improvement of the quality of instruction.

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### Annex 3. Example of a Quality Standard from the Tunisian MANFORME project

Prof. Jean-Pierre Caliste, University of Technology, Compiègne

#### Famille : 1.1 Communication, information vers les entreprises

| STANDARDS CLIENTS                                                                                                                                            | Pour respecter le standard .... il faut                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Commentaires et préconisations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1.1.1 Fidéliser les entreprises clientes et partenaires du centre</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faire participer les entreprises à la vie du centre (Comité Technique de suivi, jury d'examen,...).</li> <li>- Envoyer aux entreprises partenaires les nouvelles documentations fournissant de nouvelles informations.</li> <li>- Consulter les entreprises sur leurs besoins pour la mise à jour des programmes de formation et/ou pour l'implantation de nouvelles spécialités dans le centre.</li> <li>- Identifier les entreprises fidèles et leurs donner accès au centre de ressources, du centre.</li> <li>- Offrir des formations à la carte (F.C.) avec des remises pour les entreprises fidèles.</li> </ul> | <p>Le questionnement des entreprises doit se faire en collaboration avec le CENAFFIF.</p> <p>La mise à jour des programmes peut être fréquente alors que l'implantation d'une nouvelle spécialité est beaucoup plus rare.</p> <p>Une entreprise est fidèle lorsqu'elle utilise les services du centre au moins une fois par an (recrutement d'un jeune en alternance, commande de formation continue, demande de conseil...).</p> <p>Profiter des visites aux entreprises pour rendre des services (résolution des problèmes, expertises, ...).</p> |

RNQFP-STANDARDS CLIENTS

**Famille : 1.1 Communication, information vers les entreprises**

| STANDARDS CLIENTS                                                                                                                                                                            | INDICATEUR DE QUALITE DE SERVICE AUX CLIENTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                              | Critère respecté : mettre un «1 » dans la case <input type="checkbox"/><br>Critère non respecté : mettre un «0 » dans la case <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>1.1.1 Fidéliser les entreprises clientes et partenaires du centre</b><br><br><div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; min-height: 100px;">           Remarques :         </div> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 5px; text-align: center;">5.1</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Le taux de présence des professionnels au Comité Technique de suivi et aux jurys d'examen est supérieur à 50 % des professionnels prévus.         </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 5px; text-align: center;">5.2</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> L'envoi de la documentation (nouvelles possibilités, nouveaux programmes, bulletins d'information du centre...) aux entreprises est réalisé au moins une fois par an et consultable sur une liste de diffusion.         </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 5px; text-align: center;">5.1</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> La consultation des entreprises sur leurs besoins de mise à jour des programmes ou de nouvelles formations a lieu au moins une fois par an, attestée par un rapport annuel.         </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 5px; text-align: center;">5</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Au moins 5 % des entreprises qui prennent des apprenants utilisent le centre de ressources.         </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; margin-right: 5px; text-align: center;">5.3</div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> Le centre assure annuellement au moins 5 actions de formation à la carte (formation continue) au bénéfice des entreprises qui ont des apprenants.         </div> </div> <p align="center">/5 Note de conformité</p> |
|                                                                                                            | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">           Référence aux 7         </div><br><b>RNQFP-STANDARDS CLIENTS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |