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Trainer's and Professional's Guide to Quality
in Open and Distance Learning

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INTRODUCTION

1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

This guide is targeted for professional users of information technology in Open and Distance Learning. Professional users can be teachers, planners, material producers, technical and pedagogical support personnel working in the field of higher education. The special target groups of the guide are the trainers or the tutors of quality issues in ODL, but the guide is structured into thematic entities, so that different parts of it can be read as independent introductions to the various aspects of quality in ODL.

The first part, *Introducing Quality in Open and Distance Learning*, highlights the main concepts. Different meanings and ways of understanding the concept of quality are illustrated. Open and distance learning is approached from the different perspectives on technological change. The importance of the tools perspective on technology in the treatment of quality problems is clearly set out. The first part of the guide can be read as a short introduction to the multidimensionality of the question of quality and follow-up for all who are interested in it in the field of Open and Distance Learning.

The second part, *Making Quality Visible*, takes the student's perspective as its starting point by presenting the concepts of the student's lifecycle and learning event. The student's lifecycle is a path, which the student follows from the beginning of studies up to graduation. Lifecycle functions as the context within which the different processes of ODL are examined in order to assess the state of affairs affecting the quality of learning. The processes are broken down into different roles and activities.. These are then discussed in detail in the context of two sub processes: student support and learning material design and production. The second part of the guide is best suited for readers wishing to get an overview on how quality issues can be approached by analyzing the different processes affecting the quality of learning in ODL

from the perspective of separate role performing activities, i.e. making up the processes in question.

The third part, *Generating Quality by Using Quality Tools*, deals with quality criteria. The concepts of criterion and indicator are discussed in relation to roles and activities. It is shown how roles and activities are linked to different criteria, and moreover, how the criteria can be used at specific moments to produce quality. Before the learning event, criteria can be used to check that sufficient preparation has been made to ensure a high quality learning outcome. After the learning event, the same criteria can be used to evaluate the success of the learning event. After the evaluation, criteria can be used to set up a durable action plan and/or to construct best practices. The third part is a practical guide for ODL professionals wishing to develop and improve their working performance.

2 THE E-QUALITY PROJECT

Quality issues and quality assurance are matters of growing interest in higher education. This development has been speeded up by the Bologna process, which aims to create a common European Higher Education Area by 2010. Co-operation in quality assurance is one of the aims of the Bologna process, and with objectives like student mobility, comparable degrees and uniform degree structure, the emphasis is on coherence between European countries. International projects and research extend the knowledge of higher education systems between European countries, and more importantly, require the examination and development of quality systems nationally and locally.

The higher education institutions are using and creating quality systems to evaluate the present standard of their performance, but at the same time they need to take into account the development of higher education and the upcoming changes.

New technologies bring changes to learning events as well as to the criteria that define quality learning. The introduction of information technology in teaching confronts students and teachers with many new aspects which all have an impact on educational quality. The question of quality is one

of the most significant research areas in ODL. These considerations gave rise to the project e-Quality: Quality implementation in Open and Distance Learning in a Multicultural European Environment, partly funded by the European Commission under the Socrates/Minerva Programme.

The 3-year project, launched in October 2003, associated the following institutions:

- *European University Pole of Montpellier and Languedoc-Roussillon* – coordinator (France)
- *University Montpellier 2* (France)
- *Open University of Catalonia* (Spain)
- *University of Tampere* (Finland)
- *Technical University of Szczecin* (Poland)
- *University of Applied Sciences Valais* (Switzerland)
- *Lausanne University* (Switzerland)
- The external evaluation: *AtiT* (Belgium)

The project supplies core methodology and tools, as well as the accompanying interactive documents and resources specifying the use of the methodology and tools. The synthesis also includes an interesting comparison on blocking or helping factors for quality implementation in Higher Education institutions in general and for ODL in particular. The results of this collaborative work have been used to elaborate the objectives and to build the material for the training of national teams working for ODL development and delivery.

Main activities of the project:

- to conduct a comparative analysis of the quality of open and distance learning and the status of quality assessment in the partner countries;
- to create a model of the quality process in open and distance learning, taking into account cultural specialities;
- to create a methodological framework;
- to produce documents and tools for quality management;
- to test the training of 5 pilot teams (one in each of the 5 countries) to provide feedback on methodology and tools.

The e-Quality project started with the comparative analysis of the partners' context. National reports include statistical data on ODL, extent of equipment

and access to Internet, and a description of the situation of quality implementation, especially in higher educational institutions, including any cultural and organisational factors affecting this.

The project employs the concept of the student's lifecycle to define and illustrate the factors influencing quality. The student's lifecycle refers to the student's progress from enrolment to graduation. Special focus is on individual learning events in the student's lifecycle. These events constitute the core of learning and teaching. Thus, quality is also influenced by the structures of the organization as a whole, including effective infrastructures and support systems.

The project considers ICT based education in a broader context. From this perspective, it is important to define key sub processes in education and in individual learning events, and also to define the related support systems and the roles of different parties. The e-quality project focuses on two main sub processes: "Learning material design and production" and "Student support". This choice allows the project to examine two very different kinds of sub processes. In the frame of the e-Quality project, core activities and role are defined for these two processes. Together with the related criteria, the list of roles and activities act as a tool for ensuring and evaluating quality.

Based on the knowledge produced in the e-Quality project, the aim was to create practical materials and tools for the actors involved in open and distance learning (ODL). To raise awareness about quality in ODL and to test the materials and tools developed in the project, pilot training sessions were organized in the five participating countries. Sessions in France, Spain, Finland, Poland, and Switzerland took place during the winter of 2005/2006. The training sessions were evaluated, and materials developed according to the feedback and experiences of the trainees.

To make learning possible through ODL, many kinds of expertise are needed. The training sessions focused on different actors in ODL. Training sessions were targeted for actors involved in different ODL specialist areas. Not only teachers, but technicians, tutors and administrative personnel were welcomed into the training. The quality of a learning event in ODL relies on the success of all the different areas, and thus is improved by the quality work of all the

actors. This approach promoted fruitful interaction between the members of the whole team involved in producing high quality education. Trainees were expected to have previous experience in ODL, so their own practice, opinions and perceptions were an important part of training.

The training session covered the following subjects:

- Concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL),
- Basic quality concepts,
- Concept of role and activity,
- Concept of student lifecycle and learning event,
- Student support sub process,
- Learning material design and production sub process,
- Tools for quality work,
- Criteria and indicators.

Training was aimed at enhancing the awareness of quality issues and their importance in the context of the trainees' own work. The contents of the training session included information about the institutional, national and European levels of quality and the impact of cultural characteristics on implementing quality in ODL. From the processes related to ODL, the e-Quality project selected two sub-processes for closer examination: student support and learning material design and production. The project examines quality from the actors' point of view and introduces the concepts of role and activity into ODL. The relations of the two chosen sub-processes with roles and activities, and their interconnections in the implementation of quality were discussed during training.

The e-Quality project developed quality criteria as practicable tools, which were introduced to the trainees. These criteria can be used in different phases of the ODL process. This means that the criteria and indicators act as a checklist during the design of a learning event, as well as an evaluation tool to analyse the quality of the learning event afterwards. A third dimension is to analyze the outcome of the evaluation in order to assess the importance of different criteria, and to generate the best practices and steps for action, emerging from the experience of the actors. Thus, the project

introduces a new way of using quality criteria, not just as a tool for measuring and verifying quality, but also as a tool for planning and developing the learning events.

Although the criteria are viewed through individuals, they can also function as a means of quality assurance. Evaluating the different areas requires versatile expertise, so co-operation between those performing the different roles is beneficial. In this case, the evaluation may also promote co-operation between different actors. The evaluation may function as a learning process for the whole team implementing the learning event.

The training materials were delivered to the trainees through traditional lectures as well as through virtual learning environments. Trainees were also expected to implement in their own work the knowledge acquired during training. Training session evaluation consists in comparing the differences in the trainee's understanding of quality in ODL before and after the training session. The materials were revised to take the training sessions into account in adjusting the methodology and core documents.

This guide is based on the materials used in the training sessions. The materials were improved and modified according to the experience gained through the training sessions.

PART 1: INTRODUCING QUALITY IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

3 QUALITY

The e-Quality project approaches higher education from the perspective of open and distance learning (ODL). Regardless of this perspective, the aim is not to treat quality in ODL as separate from the quality work commonly carried out in universities. So, ODL is seen here as a type of education, sharing many of the aspects of other types of education but having, certain unique features and characteristics due to the extensive use of ICT facilitating learning. This is done firstly by looking at quality in higher education in general, through the concept of student lifecycle and then concentrating on an individual learning event carried out using the methods and tools of ODL.

This text approaches quality from the perspective of European higher education. The examples presented here are collected from the partners involved with the e-Quality project. Reports from the five countries involved describe the situation of quality implementation, ODL and cultural characteristics.

3.1 Quality in education

Before focusing on the quality of ODL, some questions of quality in education as a whole need to be clarified. The terminology and core concepts

of quality are often used inconsistently. Definitions are quoted from the corporate world and their adaptation to the educational context is not always successful. The problem in using these concepts is that they were usually developed to assess the quality of commodities and private services, not public services, like education. Quality in education is determined by the learners' actions, not only by the actions of the education provider.¹

Quality in education can be examined from various perspectives and quality criteria can be defined according to different stakeholders. The question is whose needs are taken into consideration, and which objectives need to be fulfilled. Once the stakeholder has been defined, it is easier to define the goal of the process, and thus the quality perspective.

The perspectives of quality work can be grouped into different categories according to the goal they are trying to achieve:

- *Didactic and pedagogic perspective.* The quality of the teaching and learning process are focused on.
- *Economic perspective.* Educational expenditure should be used efficiently.
- *Social perspective.* The aim is to respond to the social demand of education.
- *Consumer perspective.* The stakeholders' demands are taken into consideration i.e. students, employers etc.
- *Management perspective.* The organisational aspects and processes of education are focused on.²

These definitions are not contradictory, and

usually more than one perspective is covered. One may even ask whether these perspectives can be separated from one another? Even if didactic and pedagogic perspectives are focused on, management and economic perspectives cannot be overlooked. They clearly influence even individual courses.

In higher education the student is seldom seen as a customer, but as a member of an academic community. However, the consumer perspective can be seen as one that focuses on the goals of different stakeholders. The objectives and opinions about high quality education may differ between students, personnel and even according to the strategy of the institution. To overcome situations like this is to assume that learning is clearly a shared objective for all. One way to foster other existing objectives is to identify parallel processes and their intersections with learning.

In addition to the different perspectives on quality, many definitions of the concept of quality can be found. These different definitions cause confusion, when talking about or trying to understand the meaning of quality. This can be clarified by distinguishing between the intension and the extension of the concept of quality. The intension of the concept can be determined by identifying the characteristics and distinctive marks included in the concept. The extension of a concept can be determined by listing everything to which the intension of the concept can be adapted in real terms. So the intension refers to what the concept is and the extension, to the space or area involved in reality.

Let us now look at a grouping by Harvey and Green (1993)³ that divides quality definitions into five categories. These definitions are viewed at the level of higher education.

- *Quality as exceptional.* Quality is something special, distinctiveness.
- *Quality as perfection or consistency.* Quality is apparent when there are no faults and faultless results are delivered consistently.
- *Quality as fitness for purpose.* A product, service or an education is of good quality if it fits its purpose.
- *Quality as value for money.* Education is of good quality when it is efficient.
- *Quality as transformation.* Education has no correct

result and it is not understood as a service, but as an ongoing process of transformation.

According to the division above, the intension of the quality concept is determined by the characteristics of exceptionality, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation. An item may fulfil all or some of these characteristics to have high quality, but it has to fulfil at least one of them, if it is to be considered within the concept of quality.

When we look at the quality of education, we soon notice that although the different manifestations of quality emphasise one or another characteristic, they also share certain features. Some of these manifestations already exist in reality, so they can be discussed under the extensions of the concept of quality.

When quality is seen as perfection, education is viewed as a production model and the education has good quality when it is of a uniformly high standard. This is sought through streamlining different educational structures and processes and setting standards for institutional performance. Where people are concerned this is a problematic perspective. Students should be considered as individuals, and individual characteristics, can also lead to differences in the result of quality education.

Quality as fitness for purpose is a popular way to define quality, because it fits into different contexts and situations. Compared with the two former definitions, this definition does not emphasise exceptionality or consistency, but meeting the customer's or the stakeholder's requirements. In higher education a customer or stakeholder can be difficult to define. Is the customer the student or the one who pays for the education, for example, the government? There are equally important stakeholders in higher education in terms of how we determine the desired results, but these aims can be contradictory. A student as a customer may, for instance, aim to pass a course with a minimum amount of effort, whereas this is not a suitable purpose from the institution's perspective.

Value for money as quality can be measured by comparing the spent resources with the accomplished results. Value for money can be understood broadly, where money refers to all resources. When quality is compared to spent

resources and the value for money is measured, identifying the core stakeholder is also focused on. This raises the same questions as with previous definition: What is the desired outcome or result, and who is the authority capable of defining this?

Quality is seen as a transformation if continuous development is emphasized. This perspective includes the idea that organization is capable of self-evaluation and quality management. The core actors are the student and teachers. In the students' case this transformation means learning. Transformation can be empowerment. Empowering can occur by involving the students in decision making, for example, in determining the style and mode of learning. In higher education, students can choose their learning strategy with the help of individual learning plans. An extension of the concept of quality is e.g., students' individual learning plans to enable students to choose their learning strategy.

The previous paragraphs have dealt with the different perspectives on quality, with examples of how the concept of quality can be understood through its internal characteristics and via manifestations in the real world. As quality is totally dependent on the actions, skills and talent of human beings, it can also be developed through quality work.

Quality work includes ways to examine, identify and verify quality. Some concepts describing the various processes and activities used in quality work are listed as follows:

- *Accreditation:* Accreditation is certification by a duly recognized body of facilities, and the capability, objectivity, competence and integrity of an agency, service, operational group or an individual to provide the specific service or operation needed.
- *Assessment:* Assessment is an evaluation process including a document review, an on-site audit and an analysis and a report.
- *Audit:* Audit is an onsite verification activity used to determine the effective implementation of a documented quality system.
- *Benchmarking:* An investigation to determine how competitors and best-in-class organisations achieve their level of performance.
- *Quality assurance:* A process that aims to maintain quality and develop it.

- *Quality control:* The operational techniques and activities used to fulfil the requirements of quality.

- *Quality management:* An aspect of an overall function of business management that determines and implements the quality policy.

- *Quality plan:* A document that indicates the practices, resources and activities relevant to assure quality.

- *Quality policy:* The overall intentions and direction of an organization in regard to quality as formally expressed by the top management.

These concepts embody the different standpoints in relation to quality work. Is quality measured through standards or by benchmarking? Is assessment an adequate method or is accreditation needed? Quality assurance refers to actions, processes through which quality is maintained and developed, and through the quality policy these core processes are made visible and expressed. The quality policy gathers the overall intentions and direction of an organization, and in education they should safeguard the conditions for learning. ⁴

3.2 Quality standards and models ⁵

Standards are the level of requirements that must be achieved to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accrediting agency. A specification is a set of instructions that tells you how to do something. A standard is a specification that is either widely used within a community or is formally designated as a standard by an authority such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) or the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc. (IEEE). Specifications that achieve the status of "standard" because they represent accepted practice are sometimes called de facto standards. Standards published by official standards bodies are sometimes called de jure standards.

The word "standard" is often used to refer to practices and specifications that have become accepted in a community or industry. The e-learning field was established recently, so specialists and stakeholders are still gathering best practices approaches, and quality standards set by standards bodies are yet to be published. Standards to assure

the quality of technical issues are easier to identify than standards related to learning. In e-learning, technical solutions are integral parts of the learning environment, but other aspects should also be taken into account.

From a technical viewpoint, quality development requires technical standards conformance. In e-learning, technical issues such as accessibility, interoperability, durability, conformance, and reusability are crucial.

Definitions related to technical standards in ODL:

- *Accessibility*: A learner should access the appropriate resource at any time and in his/her own environment.
- *Interoperability*: The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers defines interoperability as “the ability of two or more systems or components to exchange information and to use the information that has been exchanged.”
- *Durability*, sometimes renamed as “sustainability”, is a property that ensures that a given resource is not completely dependent on a given technical context and could be adapted to evolving technology with no significant additional investment.
- *Reusability* means that content and code can be assembled, disassembled and reassembled quickly and easily, thus ensuring the reusability of parts of content in contexts other than the one for which it was initially designed.
- *Compliance* and *conformance* are two terms that are often used interchangeably. Formally, “conformance” is a technical concept and “compliance” implies some kind of authoritative verification. Conformance with a standard means using the standard in the way that it was intended. Most standards include a formal conformance statement. Compliance with a standard means conforming to the standard in a way that has been formally verified. Most standards will include a formal statement of what it means to comply with the standard. Proof of compliance with the standard is often called “certification”.

In most of the partner countries in e-Quality project, quality models are not applied as such, but models are used as a guideline or they have been modified to fit purpose. Five countries in the

project use specific models that are adaptations of the existing models or just the set of indicators and questionnaires. The use of specific models implies that each university stresses different aspects. Some models are quality management systems, while others focus more on the learning process. Even though the quality models were rejected as such, there may be features in these models adaptable to institutions’ own quality work. The two main models mentioned in national reports are ISO and EFQM.

Created in 1947, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is a network of the national institutes of standardization. ISO is organised according to the principle of one member per country and the Central Secretariat, located in Geneva, ensures the overall coordination. For a long time the ISO had as its main activity the development of technical standards to bring solutions to the problems of production and distribution. Nowadays, its work programme ranges from standards for traditional activities, such as agriculture and construction, mechanical engineering, manufacturing and distribution, to transport, medical devices, information and communication technology developments, and to standards for services.

The companies which respect the ISO standards can ask for an official recognition. This certification is obtained - for a three-year period - after an audit done by a certification body. This certification is a quality label which guarantees to the customers of the company the respect of the requirements of the standard for which the certification was obtained.

The principal standard, ISO 9001:2000, highlights the following principles:

- *Customer focus*: the organizations must understand their customers’ present and future needs, to meet their requirements and even exceed their expectations.
- *Leadership*: the managers’ role is fundamental in the success of the quality step, especially to implicate all the personnel. The leaders must involve the personnel to reach the objectives and realize the ambitions of the company; the key factors for this principle: to clearly set out its policy, objectives, commitment, the means to implement, the responsibilities for of these; to communicate within the organisation; to evaluate,

measure, and reward.

- *Involvement of people*: at all levels, people must understand that they are the essence of the organisation; their full involvement is needed to achieve its success; innovation and creativity are encouraged as well as the participation in the continuous improvement of the results.

- *Process approach*: this ensures greater efficiency in resource management with a clear definition of activities and related resources, lowering costs and shortening cycle times; it also includes risk management.

- *Continual improvement*: this is a permanent axis of progress; each member of the staff contributes to it and takes part in the responsibility. Quality is no longer a static and fixed system but bases its legitimacy and action on concrete results in continual improvement.

- *Measure the increasing of the customers' satisfaction*: this guarantees reaching the final objective, which is to increase this satisfaction.

The EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) was founded in 1988 by 14 leading European businesses, and aims at helping European businesses in implementing a form of Total Quality Management (TQM). The first EFQM model was created in 1991 and later reviewed in 1999, to “promote world-class approaches to the management of European organisations that would lead to sustainable excellence” and success. The EFQM model is currently used by thousands of public and private organizations as a self-assessment framework.

“EFQM Fundamental Concepts of Excellence” introduced 8 core concepts:

- *Results Orientation*. Excellence is achieving results that delight all the organization's stakeholders.

- *Customer Focus*. Excellence is creating sustainable customer value.

- *Leadership and Constancy of Purpose*. Excellence is visionary and inspirational leadership, coupled with constancy of purpose.

- *Management by Processes and Facts*. Excellence is managing the organization through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts.

- *People Development and Involvement*. Excellence

is maximizing the contribution of employees through their development and involvement.

- *Continuous Learning, Innovation and Improvement*. Excellence is challenging the status quo and effecting change by utilizing learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities.

- *Partnership Development*. Excellence is developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships.

- *Corporate Social Responsibility*. Excellence is exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organization operates, and striving to understand and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders in society.

Although standards can be a certified way to measure quality this can be an oversimplifying way to look at quality in education. One way to examine quality is to take it as a concept which is highly affected by the context. This perspective allows flexibility and takes into account the different contextual situations. On the other hand, if standardisation in all forms is refused, it is impossible to produce comparable knowledge or even use benchmarking between institutions.

3.3 Quality in open and distance learning (ODL)

Quality in ODL becomes more important when institutions already have experience in using technology in education. Following these experiences their impact can be evaluated. Education, whether ODL or traditional, should respond to the objectives set by different stakeholders, from the management of an institution to the students participating in education.

The standards and quality models presented earlier can be used to evaluate the quality of organizations, even in educational institutions. However, for an individual learning event these can be hard and complicated to implement. More importantly, the actors involved with a specific learning event need guidelines for the quality assurance of their normal activities. This means ways to pursue quality through their own actions in their area of responsibility. Usually the issue is not the quality assurance of the whole institution or a large educational system, but an individual course or learning event. In ODL, this

is the area that is not yet widely covered.

The quality work done in institutions in general should not be forgotten. The use of technology brings special characteristics to the learning event, but the basis and many aspects of teaching and learning still remain. The quality work of ODL should not be considered as separate, but as a process to be integrated within the overall development of quality in education.

On the basis of the existing quality work, one important thing is to examine how the learning process changes when new learning environments are introduced. Differences can be found in performances, actions and the way activities are done in the learning event.

Does the ODL differ so drastically from the traditional teaching and learning processes as to warrant different quality assurance methods, criteria and new approaches? This has been the core question since the emergence of learning technology and distance learning in educational institutions. Stella and Gnanam⁶ point out the division of opinions in this matter. They acknowledge the differences between methods, and argue that distance education differs so significantly from traditional teaching that the methods of quality assurance must also be different. They stress that the distinctive features of distance education cannot be overlooked.

Another perspective emphasizes the risk of separating ODL from traditional learning. The apprehension is that separating technology-enhanced learning and considered it as a subsidiary method increases the comparison with traditional learning and the unnecessary ranking between these two. It was pointed out in the national reports from the e-Quality partners that teachers working in ODL are not always appreciated in the same way as teachers of traditional courses, and only on-campus teaching is recognized as fulfilling the teaching obligations.

Undermining the differences between methods doesn't solve the problem, but this concern must be recognized. If one's work is not recognized or appreciated, why invest in it? Recognition has a direct link to motivation and thus to quality.

Different methods fit different purposes. They must both be well planned, implemented and evaluated. Stella and Gnanam (1994)⁷ point out the one thing that is common to both: They can both

be well or poorly done.

Experience produces best practices and knowledge of whether the lesson is learned. Because of long tradition, we have a somewhat shared notion of what good teaching is. But do we share the notion of what good distance education is? Do the same the criteria apply to both? It has been acknowledged that technology-enhanced learning is not only a new way to transmit information but also changes the student-teacher relationship, and requires new skills and abilities from all the participants.

The roles of actors will be examined in more detail in a different chapter, but one thing that is closely related to quality assurance should be mentioned here. How are methods and ways to assure quality affected by the fact that teaching is loosely connected to organization? Quality assurance processes, audit or accreditation are usually closely connected to organizational aspects. In distance education the students take a bigger role in directing and controlling their studies. Thus, students' perspectives must be included in evaluating and quality assurance.

3.4 Levels of quality: European and national perspectives

At the European level important initiatives have been launched to promote quality, in recent years. Concerning higher education, the Bologna process is the most important among these. The ultimate goal of the Bologna Declaration is to create a common European Higher Education Area by 2010 with a view to improving the competitiveness and attraction of European higher education in relation to other continents. One goal is to define and observe Europe-wide quality standards in higher education. A precondition is the elaboration of comparable methods and criteria to assess the quality of research and teaching.

The Bologna process was speeded up by meetings in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005), where quality was stressed as a core mechanism in creating the European higher education area.⁸

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) disseminates information, experiences and good practices in the

field of quality assurance in higher education to European quality agencies, public authorities and higher education institutions. A set of standards and guidelines were created by ENQA to assist and guide higher education institutions and national quality agencies in quality work. The ENQA emphasizes that quality standards, as published in their report “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, should not be treated as unchangeable guidelines or guidelines that dictate practice. Their purpose is to form a background for quality work and highlight the core aspects.

All the countries in the e-Quality project have a specific agency dealing with quality issues, although the role and influence of these agencies on individual institutions varies. Some agencies assist institutions by providing recommendations and guidelines for their quality work, while others are accrediting agencies.⁹ There is a need to establish common indicators and evaluation systems, share good practices and create networks. Cooperation between different actors in the field is also needed to develop evaluation methods by exchanging experiences, training staff together and starting joint experimental projects. A shared notion of quality at European level increases the transparency of education systems and helps to create a common European education area.

According to Hämäläinen and Jakku-Sihvonen (2000)¹⁰ one of the central conflict issues in the quality policy will be the pressure to harmonize European education and simultaneously emphasize the different characters, needs and possibilities of individuals, education institutions and countries.

Cultural aspects should be taken into account in quality work. There are also shared concerns, as seen in the national reports of e-quality project partners. One of the common concerns was the low value of the pedagogical issue. All countries wanted to introduce a more pedagogical point of view in quality systems and create pedagogical indicators. Quality certificates, measures and indicators for ODL are welcomed. This may solve the problem of the lack of recognition and unofficial nature of ODL, that most partners reported.

Partners of the e-Quality project pointed out that launching ODL courses is usually an individual decision made by a teacher. Organisational

support, decisions and leadership are needed. Understanding the special characteristics of ODL is insufficient. New learning systems imply a new role for the teacher as well as new services from the institutions.

4 OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

SOCRATES, the European Community action programme for co-operation in the field of education, was adopted on 14 March 1995. The SOCRATES programme promotes co-operation in the following areas:

- Higher Education
- School Education
- Promotion of language-learning
- Information and communication technologies in education
- Observation and innovation of education systems and policies
- Adult Education and other educational pathways
- Joint action with other European programmes
- Supplementary measures

In the Socrates programme, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is defined as the use of new methods - technical and/or non-technical - to improve the flexibility of learning in terms of space, time, the choice of content or teaching resources and/or to improve access to educational systems from a distance. The development of open and distance education is considered as a key factor enabling citizens of the European Union to take advantage of an open European area for co-operation in education.

As a result of the new programmes and initiatives ODL is a common term in Europe today. Understanding the core concepts is important, because the concepts embody statements and attitudes towards learning.

In the 1990's the expression “Distance Education” (DE) was mainly used to emphasize the delivery of education. The fundamental aspect of Distance Learning (DL) resides in

the use of modern technologies such as web-based learning environments, mobile phones and videoconferencing, to allow students to take a course without being physically present in the classroom. This opposes traditional face-to-face education, as we know it in the classroom-based environment.

Distance learning was a descriptive term used when students were physically away from campus and unable to attend face-to-face education. Thus, distance was considered as something substitutive to normal teaching methods. When distance was no longer the main characteristic and students could take courses even though they were on campus, distance learning became somewhat unsuitable. This led to emphasizing that distance education was not compared to normal, but to traditional learning.

Some courses cannot be taught entirely at distance, but require a mix of traditional face-to-face events with ODL that is more flexible in time and space. Thus every ODL course will vary in the amount of distance vs. face-to-face, interactivity vs. self-studying it contains. The concepts of blended learning or mixed-mode learning reflect the situation where new technologies are used alongside traditional methods.

Distance learning refers to the idea of delivery mode, but it has become a wider concept because it encompasses the idea of student-centredness. The idea is to promote alternative study paths and recognise the different situations of students. The shift to emphasizing the perspective behind technology has combined two concepts: open learning and distance learning.

The idea of Open Learning (OL) is somewhat wider since it implies greater flexibility for the student; in terms of the location of the student and media of delivery for the content: in this sense, distance learning is a part of open learning. There is also flexibility in terms of time-management, pace of learning, learning style (more theoretical vs. based on more case-studies, more individual vs. more participative).

Tella (1998) sums up the understanding of this concept: Open learning is considered more of a philosophy or attitude towards organising the teaching/learning process in a flexible manner. The tools and software used in ODL are often quite the same as in distance education, but the concept

emphasizes the shift from a more teacher-centred environment towards a learner-centred and virtual learning environment with a focus on distributed expertise and cognitive tools and groupware.

Open and distance learning reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.¹¹

Open and distance learning systems can usually be described as made up of a range of components such as the mission or goal of a particular system, programmes and curricula, teaching/learning strategies and techniques, learning material and resources, communication and interaction, support and delivery systems, students, tutors, staff and other experts, management, housing and equipment, and evaluation.”¹²

*“It is more than ever clear that open and distance learning will be an important element of future education and training systems. The emergence of new forms of distance learning based on new information and communication technologies, in particular those supported by the Internet and using the World Wide Web, has significant pedagogical, economic and organizational implications.”*¹³

Open and Distance Learning is a general expression covering all forms of learning and teaching different from traditional face-to-face training. E-learning is only one form of ODL but ODL is more general in terms of technological means. In the history of distance education four stages can be found. The history of distance education started with correspondence education as early as 1840. At the second stage the use of media, TV and radio, increased. However, the basic problem was the lack of interaction. The third stage of distance education introduced asynchronous and two-way interaction, which was made possible by modern telecommunication like telephones, e-mail and the first videoconferencing solutions.

The fourth phase of the development is e-learning. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching was characteristic of this stage. E-learning can be seen as a form of ODL, and is used in parallel with ODL. E-Learning is a term widely used commercially to describe

new and innovative ways to organize and facilitate teaching and learning. It is recognised that e-learning is not merely a new delivery mode of teaching, but changes the roles of teacher and students, requires new perspectives, abilities and attitudes on the part of the actors.

4.1 Information technology and ODL

Information Technology can be defined in a variety of ways. Here is one commonly accepted definition taken from Wikipedia:

"Information Technology (IT) or Information and Communication(s) Technology (ICT) is the technology required for information processing. In particular the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit, and retrieve information"

Let us now look at the intension, i.e. the distinctive characteristics, which belong to the concept of information technology. It's quite easy to see from this definition that intension is spelled out by saying that IT or ICT "is the technology required for information processing". This intension gives the nature of information technology in relation to other types of technology.

The second sentence in our definition provides the extension, or at least part of it, by stating that IT means "the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit, and retrieve information". This extension focuses on computers and software although the majority of the hardware and software for information processing already exists in devices other than computers. In ODL for instance, digital video equipment and software used for distance learning are such information processing devices. Nevertheless the definition given above is accurate enough for our purposes, because we primarily face information technology in the form of computers, networks, and software, enabling us to change our way of teaching and learning.

In addition to the definition of information technology and the meaning implied, we have to look at different assumptions, attitudes and approaches towards information technology and technology in general to understand certain

specific phenomena encountered in the context of ODL and the quality issue. Merely defining IT does not reveal the assumptions, attitudes and approaches implicitly or explicitly connected with the utilisation of information technology, because these have not developed as a result of progress in information technology, but have their grounding in the history of industrial and post-industrial society. So, for instance the strong resistance sometimes shown by teachers to any attempts to change their working routines may be partly due to technological pessimism in general. According to this view technological development results in the loss of human and cultural values and the old ideals of what was considered as civilised life.

The aim is not to go too deeply into the discussion about the nature of technology, at this stage. However, as information technology, open and distance learning and the question of quality of learning make up a complex whole, it is important to realize how the various assumptions, attitudes and approaches towards technology condition the discussion about ODL and the quality of learning. Moreover, these approaches seem to have different emphasis at different levels, whether international, transnational, national, institutional or personal in the discussion on the quality of ODL.

The aim here is also to argue against the neutrality of technology thesis, which states that technology in itself is not good or bad, but that the decisive thing is how we choose to use it. In the discussion about the quality of learning this instrumental view can be seen in arguments stating that good teachers in traditional type of education are also likely to be good at ODL and vice versa, or that computers and networks as such guarantee access for all to education. This instrumental view reduces the whole question of ODL and its quality to problems of organizing education and developing the necessary skills for the teachers as well as their customers, the students.

Clearly, the non-neutrality of technology means, that to some extent, technology has an effect beyond the question of how it is used. This means that technology as such has an effect on the users, whereas the mere instrumentalist view gives an oversimplified conception of it. When we are confronted with a technology such as information technology, no matter how it is used, it has both positive and negative effects on us.

Let us look at information technology and ODL from the non-neutral perspective. If we want to set up ODL, the teacher and students have to have computers at work, at home or in computer classes with connections to internet. They have to go to the computers, sit in front of the display, use a keyboard and mouse to interact in order to organise learning and to learn. When in trouble they need instructions and support from experts in information technology.

On a larger scale, the setting up of virtual learning spaces (VLS) or e-Learning platforms requires configuring the software on servers, training teachers in their usage and giving instructions to students on how to study on them. Already from these few examples, it is quite easy to see that the use of information technology changes the whole traditional set up of education. This is emphasized, when shifting from the technical and organizational issues of education to the pedagogical ones.

We can divide the assumptions, approaches and attitudes into three broad categories partly overlapping each other. These three approaches to technology are *technological determinism*, *utilitarian understanding of technology* and *a tools perspective on technology*. It must be noted again that these approaches are not specific to information technology but have their roots in the development of different kinds of technologies in the course of the industrial society.

Technological determinism is a technology led theory of social change according to which the development of technology causes change independent of the will of human beings. At the beginning of the information technology revolution this kind of attitude prevailed when it was supposed that a mere increase in the computing power and growth of computer networks would by their own power change the whole of society. As a consequence information technology inevitably changes the way in which education in a society is organised and learning happens. Thus the quality of learning is solely dependent on the innovations generated by the development of information technology.

Oddly enough technological determinism can result in two opposite opinions concerning the outcomes of technological development. These two polarities are technological optimism or technophilia

and technological pessimism or technophobia. Determinism as optimism means blind faith in the power of technology to solve social problems without any value conflicts. So, technophilia emphasises the neutrality of technology in respect to the choices made in the introduction of technological innovations. Based on this is the idea that the development of ODL with the help of information technology opens access to learning and makes the learning process independent of time and space. The quality of learning is determined by standardised and networked IT systems through the compatibility of these systems.

According to the pessimistic view the development of technology is out of human control and leads to the subordination of individuals by the domination of technology. This means that an educational system based on the development of ODL abolishes human interaction in teaching and learning, subjugating individuals to extensions of computers and networked information. This implies that the quality of learning can only be talked of in the context of human interaction when it produces a qualitative change in the learner.

The second, larger approach was essentially called the utilitarian understanding of technology. It emphasises the gains or results achieved with the introduction of technologies. The relationship between technology and society as well as the choices are determined by the expected total gain from the use of technology. So, technology and technological systems are valuable when they are cost effective and intensify work performances. In the field of education this means that information technology in ODL must enable institutions to offer education for wide audiences in a cost effective manner. The quality of learning is established through the standardization of information systems and software and by harmonising the institutional requirements for education. Standardisation and harmonisation are achieved with the help of IT strategies and quality work. In this manner the utilitarian perspective on technology stresses the importance of policy choices and management when technological systems are introduced, i.e. a transformation of institutions in a top-down manner.

Our third approach looks at technology as equipment or tools. These being used by different actors, the perspective emphasises the work

performances of individuals, teams or working units. The value of technology is determined by its applicability in fulfilling different tasks and emphasises the knowledge and skills of different actors in the utilising process of technology. Thus ODL facilitates the educational personnel to plan, produce and deliver educational contents in a new, flexible and efficient way. The quality of learning depends on the collaboration and interplay between different actors participating into the production of learning events amounting to learning processes. The approach emphasises the knowledge and skills of the actors, which are directed simultaneously into the thing to be done and the tools needed in the process of doing or making.

PART 2: MAKING QUALITY VISIBLE

5 STUDENT'S LIFECYCLE AND LEARNING EVENT

5.1 Student's lifecycle

The concept of lifecycle is most commonly used in biology to describe the whole path of a life form from its beginning until the end. According to this meaning lifecycle includes all the external processes and internal metamorphoses affecting the development of an individual organism. As such a lifecycle includes an idea of qualitative change that follows the individual throughout his/her life.

When planning and introducing new products into the market the concept of lifecycle is also applied. Then it can mean either the whole process of innovating, designing, producing and marketing the product or its path from invention to a consumed commodity and finally as a substituted jumble.

These two examples already provide some factors describing the concept of a lifecycle. Firstly they seem to imply that the object of lifecycle is always an entity, e.g. a life form, a product or as in our case a student. Secondly, lifecycle refers to an internal qualitative change of the entity in question. This qualitative change can be described as a process between a starting point and an endpoint. For a life form this process happens between birth and death, for a product between the innovation and final

or consumed product and for a student between recruitment into education and graduation. Thirdly, there are external processes affecting and bringing forth the internal qualitative change, e.g. for a life form the process of nutrition, for a product the processes of design and usage of raw materials and for a student the organisation and implementation of teaching and learning.

The concept of student's lifecycle can be employed to describe the student's path either from recruitment to graduation or enrolment on another course after successfully passing the course. Such a description makes it possible to point out all the processes affecting the student's lifecycle and also to analyse how these affect the qualitative change in the student, i.e. the development of his/her level of knowledge and/or scientific and vocational skills. In this broad sense the analysis of student's lifecycle and the accompanying processes reveal the states of affairs affecting the quality of learning.

The approach of the eQuality project was narrowed by its assignment, so that in the context of student's lifecycle only those processes emerging in ODL and especially having an effect on the quality of education were chosen for rigorous study. So, the project employs the concept of the student's lifecycle to define and illustrate the factors influencing quality. The student's lifecycle refers to the student's progress from enrolment to graduation. Thus, quality is also influenced by the structures of the entire organization, including effective infrastructures and support systems.

A desire to underline the student's active role led to examining the concept of student's lifecycle. The

student's lifecycle will act as a counterpart to the other core viewpoints, roles and related activities. Emphasizing only the actors around the student would leave the student as a passive receiver of knowledge. Roles and activities are always examined in relation to the students' progress and learning.

Current developments in higher education can also be illustrated with the student's lifecycle. The expansion of choices between different study paths, the appreciation of different situations in life, acknowledgement of different learning styles and emphasis on flexibility in general are the current trends. Simultaneously the emphasis is on the effectiveness and planning of studies. Choices that students make should be well advised, reasoned and should promote the students' general goals. The success of this progress requires re-examining the organisations' operations. If the individual learning paths are emphasized, the organisations' structure should equally promote these different paths. The relevant question here is, will the student get as much support when choosing the alternative study path.

The student's lifecycle can be described as a path that an individual student follows through studies. Readjusting the route is expected, and changing the whole direction is also allowed. What is expected from the organization is that whatever path the student chooses, s/he has equal resources and support. Even though the lifecycle model may seem schematic, it can help to anticipate the needs for support between these different alternatives.

The increase of choices does not mean that all the alternatives are allowed. The organisation still determines the available choices. Emphasising the student's choices does not mean allowing anything students want, but supporting the students' needs in order to reach their individual goals.

Adapting the quality models straight from the business world will occasionally add pressure to universities to treat the students as their customers. However, this does not correspond to reality. The student at university should be a member of the academic community who has duties as well as just rights. Thus, quality is not about answering students' wishes, but also pursuing the generally accepted objectives of the university.

Planning a common lifecycle model, adaptable to different organizations, is a difficult task due

to organisational differences. The model can be built according to the degree structure to proceed chronologically or consist of modules and individual blocks of study. Even though the degree structure may be the same the surrounding support systems, infrastructure etc. can vary. These all affect student lifecycle.

The concept of the student's lifecycle is essential from the quality point of view. The increase in choices and the students' opportunity to direct their studies will affect motivation towards studying as a whole and towards the individual courses they take. Mere motivation and a positive attitude towards studies may not guarantee quality but they provide a favourable soil for the actors to begin with.

5.2 Learning event

Alongside the process perspective, there is also a special focus on the individual learning events in the student's lifecycle. These events constitute the core of learning and teaching. To put it another way, the qualitative change in the student's knowledge and skills depends on the success or failure of the learning event. As such the learning event is a point of impact for several processes, which together determine the level of quality in education. Learning events refer to events based on curriculum objectives, such as study modules or even individual components of study modules such as online lectures, seminar work, and independent work based on educational materials, or assigning and handing in coursework.

The concept used here is the learning event, instead of the teaching event. This choice of concept comes naturally with the ODL focus. A teaching event can be described as an event with a defined time, place and roles of actors, teacher and learner. When examining the virtual learning environment these elements are not so well defined. Of course one could argue that this process is better defined by the concept of studying than learning. It should be acknowledged that learning is the goal of the process and not a guaranteed result. But by using the concept of learning event all the aspects influencing the learning, not just the learner's own activity, are emphasized. When in face-to-face

situations planning was more about how to teach the contents, in virtual environments anticipating the students' learning has become the salient point.

The term “event” refers to something with a clear-cut beginning and end, but with learning the time line is more imprecise. Event here represents the meeting point of students, other actors, activities and all the elements designed to promote learning. A learning event is organized and structured according to the curriculum and therefore it is compatible with the mission of the institution and the individual course.

A learning event can be perceived through five questions:

- *Who*: The learner is an active actor in the learning event, searching information, making observations and asking questions. The learner is interacting with the learning community.
- *Where*: The learning environment is a physical or virtual setting where learning takes place. Besides physical surroundings the environment also includes immaterial elements, like atmosphere.
- *When*: The event, when learning happens, is not always a clear-cut period of time, but when it is seen as a part of the institutions' structure, some timelines can be defined.
- *What*: Goals for learning can be implicit or explicit, and sometimes learning can consist of aspects that were not anticipated at all.
- *How*: Fellow learners, other actors, learning activities, pedagogical methods, contents and all the previously mentioned aspects affect learning.

6 PROCESSES, ROLES, ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS

6.1 Processes

In the preceding chapter different processes were mentioned many times, which emphasizes the fact that the term is very widely used nowadays. At times it feels as though everything is a process and there is nothing but processes. Commonsense understanding identifies processes with changes in

time and space involving different stages or phases. In this sense attending lectures and preparing for exams is a learning process, working out for an athletic competition is a training process, doing business is a business process and so on. This practical way of speaking about processes is adequate in everyday life indicating that people understand that changes take time, involve actors and different states of affairs and have an end state like a passed exam, being in good shape, or conducting profitable business. However, this understanding is not quite enough, if one wants to model, to plan or to implement processes.

In modelling processes there are abstractions. Process modelling tries to describe the starting point, different phases, sub processes, actors, linkages to other affecting processes, and the end point of the process under modelling. Usually modelling is based on an existing process, which is analysed by making perceptions out of it. New processes can be shaped by determining the different actors, their roles, activities, facilities, tools and artefacts in the different phases of the eligible process. Modelling aims at a pure description of the process leaving out all irrelevant information, all the irregularities of individual variants and the effects of different environments on the same process. This is why processes in modelling are said to be abstractions. The model of a process, i.e. the abstraction can be multi layered presenting the different sub processes as individual entities. How detailed and how layered the model is, depends a lot on the purpose of the modelling.

In planning, processes are not abstractions but schemes of individual spatio-temporal processes, with the help of which one can map out processes in future. To make a blueprint for a process means that all the imaginable elements like the actors, resources, other accompanying processes and blocking factors are described and inserted into a timeline. As modelling tries to construct a general description of a process, i.e. a model, planning aims at a precise definition of all the real and coming circumstances that determine the progression of an individual process. So, the planning is anchored in the conditions of reality, but at the same time it is directed towards preparing for the adequate conditions of a new individual process.

An implemented or occurred process is a “real thing” with a starting point and an endpoint, defined

in between by steps or phases in a determined order. As “real things” processes take time. At this stage of the process all the states of affairs affecting the progress of the particular process are in play. Actors must take actions, raw materials have to be used and accompanying processes and blocking factors must have their impact on shaping the process in question. Also accidental factors have their influence on the process during its duration. So for planning aimed at constructing a blueprint for a process with a timeline, the implemented or occurred process endures and evokes a change in the conditions of reality. How much this change is in accordance with the aim of the planned process largely depends on the quality of the plan and on the forces of accidental factors.

In the e-Quality project all these approaches to ODL processes focused on the question of quality were in use. They are presented here as three separate questions:

- How can the general model for quality process be developed in the context of ODL processes?
- How can the implementation of the quality process be planned for ODL professionals?
- How can the quality process be implemented with the help of training ODL professionals in the usage of quality tools?

6.2 *Roles, activities and tools*

Compared to the preparation and implementation of traditional education, open and distance learning (ODL) requires the fulfilment of a number of different activities and the connected usage of equipment and tools provided by the information technology that is not usually associated with traditional teaching and learning. In different institutions the way in which these activities are made available largely depends on the organisational aspects and the corresponding competencies and responsibilities of the people involved in ODL. In some universities the whole educational process is based on the sole usage of information and communications technologies (ICT) with organisational branches for student recruitment, administration, student support, learning material design, pedagogical design, student information system etc. In other institutions there are special

units guiding and supporting the usage of ICT in or among the traditional administrative and/or educational hierarchy and organisational structure. In the simplest case the individual teacher has the overall duty and responsibility for the ODL design and implementation in the institution.

At the level of a single university, the activities and associated use of equipment and tools for the production of ODL are usually included in the qualifications and responsibilities of different occupational positions and statuses. There may be special jobs for information technology services, support and management, the pedagogical design of learning materials, instructional design, student recruitment and registration, information retrieval, planning and the management of courses and other learning events and so on. Even administration specific tools like learning management systems (LMS), e-Learning platforms, courseware solutions, web sites and mailing lists may be assigned to the duties of specific personnel in different branches and units of the higher education institution.

To cope with the multiplicity of things to be done – here lies the major difference compared to the traditional modes of education – co-operation between the different actors is needed. In fact, collaborative work is the prerequisite for success in ODL.

This heterogeneous nature of the environment of ODL – the differences in organisational structure of the institutions and the multiplicity of the tools to be used - is challenging especially from the point of view of the quality of education.

To achieve quality at least two questions must be answered: who is bringing forth quality and how is the quality generated. For the first question, the answers are usually sought by identifying the key actors, e.g. teachers, technicians, web designers, tutors and analysing their performance, especially their effectiveness. This means that the emphasis is put on technical matters aimed at accommodating the learning contents, course structures and evaluation to the information technological set up or the tools used during the learning event. The second question is usually dealt with by developing measures to get information from the usage and importance of different solutions and tools.

Here the approach is a different one. The general idea is that certain activities have to occur in order

to guarantee the quality of the ODL. The activities fall into certain types on the basis of which the necessary roles can be identified. Activities are carried out with equipment and tools (artefacts).

6.2.1 *ROLE*

A role is a set of expectations in an active process towards an end result or objective. The set of expectations define how the individuals should do the work in order to achieve good quality in ODL learning event (or learning object) as an end result. The expectations are separated into two categories: expectations concerning competence and expectations concerning responsibility. The expectations concerning competence refer to the skills and abilities which the bearer/s of a role has/have in order to be able to bring about quality in the learning event. The expectations concerning responsibility refer to the activities the bearer/s of a role has/have to perform in order to achieve good quality in a learning event. The role determines what an individual does, not what he or she is. The role is always interactive, because it is determined by expectations.

The separation between competence and responsibility is necessary, because the bearer of the role cannot fulfil the responsibility if s/he lacks the skills and abilities required and although s/he has the competence s/he may not carry out the responsibility. Both cases result in poor quality.

The role should not be mixed with job titles or occupational statuses because one individual may be a bearer of many roles, or in another case, one role may be divided between many individuals, e.g. when they act as a functional team. A status determines the individual's position in an institutional hierarchy, not necessarily his/her duties. A status is fixed by institutional norms, when a role, in this conception, is not fixed or prescribed in the same manner but is something that can be constantly negotiated between individuals in a tentative, creative way because of the expectations.

We can identify different roles by listing different sets of expectations and name them accordingly. One role may have many names. Naming roles does not mean specifying existing occupational statuses, because – as said above – the job titles and roles do not match. Every time we find a specific

set of expectations, we have a new role. Roles can be identified by using sub processes as a basis for identification. Roles are exclusionary; the role of an instructional designer is not the same as the role of the content producer. This is due to the necessary separation between competence and responsibility. This does not mean that an individual cannot change roles.

6.2.2 *ACTIVITY*

An activity is a flow of goal directed actions by a role or group of roles, which are motivated by a joint object (student, learning material, curriculum, etc.) and an objective (good quality of learning). The goal directed actions must be undertaken to fulfil the objective. Outside an activity there are other activities which have interconnections with this specific activity. Together they form a network of actions. An activity can facilitate other activities with its results. The activities can be interconnected only with the help of roles, e.g. interconnections need goal directed actions like communication and networking.

The activities have a temporal shape, they have a starting point, an end point, preceding activities and following activities. The activities cannot be separated only e.g., into the planning stage and the delivery phase, because the temporal duration of activities is not the same as the duration of the planning and the delivery of a learning event (lecture course, seminar, etc.).

Because the activities are sets of goal directed actions, they can be grouped according to their goals into separate and exclusionary categories of activities (e.g. planning is not co-ordinating etc.). So the activities appear as descriptors of processes and sub processes. According to this view the activities, not the roles demarcate processes and sub processes. This is rather easy to illustrate by saying that there can be roles without activities or processes but there cannot be processes without activities and activities without roles.

6.2.3 Tools

Tools are man-made objects. Tools as artefacts are an antithesis of a natural entity, because an artefact is created by human intentional activity, whereas the natural entity is shaped by random, natural forces.

The simplest artefact is a man-made tool. In ODL on this primary level these include the computer, e-mail, media software, graphic editor, Internet etc. which are tools that can be utilised in different actions to achieve goals. There are also artefacts as intellectual facilitators or agents. These artefacts connect the tools to the activities, and function as bridges between technical tools and intellectual tools. In ODL, mailing lists, bulletin boards, e-learning platforms, databases, information retrieval engines etc. are such artefacts of the second level. There can also be artefacts that define the good or bad usage of the primary and second level artefacts. In ODL, evaluation grids, quality charts, training materials etc. are such artefacts of the third level. These artefacts help to create and maintain new contexts of teaching, learning and communicating bringing forth qualified learning results. These third level artefacts can be called empowering mediators.

It is fairly easy to see that the third level artefacts can only be created on the basis of knowledge concerning the primary and second level artefacts and their utilisation in different activities. So, concentrating only on the third level artefacts leads astray, in fact the third level artefacts cannot exist without the preceding ones, because these are the precondition for their existence.

7 FOCUSING ON TWO SUB PROCESSES

7.1 *Creating quality in student support*

Open and distance learning (ODL) can be understood as a synthesis of open learning and distance education. Distance education refers to used technologies and the flexibility of education modes, and openness emphasizes the idea of learner-centeredness. New technology combined with an emphasis on the learner raises the importance

of efficient support. In this guide, the quality of ODL is examined from a student perspective, thus naturally student support is one of the processes emphasized.

Student support is essential to every learning event. Even in self-study courses support should be provided. Students' skills may vary greatly, and therefore some students need more support than others. This means that there can be different levels of support, from the written instructions to personal support. In ODL courses there is also an aspect of technical skills. These facts affect the organising of the student support. First, the support should be easily available for those who need it, but still remain in the background so that it is not intrusive. Secondly, there should be support for different aspects of the course, for instance support for the use of technology and support for the learning of the contents.

Regardless of the quality perspective, when the quality of education is examined, the students are the core stakeholders. From this starting point, good quality in education is achieved when the students have reached the learning objectives. By focusing on the activities in the learning event the understanding of the whole process can be increased. Quality is achieved by best practice, i.e. by the best way of performing an individual activity. This best practice is dependent on the objective of this activity. In this chapter the main objective is supporting student learning, so the following activities are described from this perspective. This is not to say that quality in education cannot be defined in other ways and measured by the satisfaction of other stakeholders.

The processes of ODL are intertwined. This means that the roles presented here incorporate activities from different processes. The focus should be more on the activities than on the role under which they are listed. A general approach to the processes, roles and activities is first to start with the activities needed to be performed, then to identify the processes these activities are part of and to recognise which role is involved when performing a certain activity.

7.2 *The roles and activities of student support*

The activities are listed under the roles responsible for these activities. By separating the concepts of actor and role the difficulty of combining the institutional differences is facilitated. Actors are persons holding the position or a certain title, like professors or lecturers etc. When these actors are involved with a learning event, like an ODL course, they take on a role/roles with a set of activities. The roles have been created by focusing on the ODL course, not the institution organising the course. This means that a set of roles can be identified, regardless of who is the actor in the institution responsible for the activities related to these roles. The roles should therefore be common to all ODL courses, regardless of the institutional differences. For example, in order to create a quality course somebody has to plan the schedule, create the rules and lead the learning dynamics, in other words, do the activities of the “teacher” role. An important thing is that all the activities are considered and performed.

The activities under the roles of student support are naturally directly connected to the students. Therefore the success of students’ support has an effect on how the students experience the whole course. Student support can be organized in various ways depending on the organization, its structure and resources. In some cases one actor may be responsible for the whole course and almost all the activities. In the opposite case, there can be many actors on a course holding the same role. In this case, the activities of the role can be divided between these actors. For example, on the course there may be one actor responsible for personal technical support, another actor designing the technical infrastructure and a third actor taking care of access control. These are the activities of technical support. All these actors therefore hold the role of technical support when performing these activities. The division of activities between the actors is thus flexible.

Most of the students’ support roles are connected to the students’ learning process during the actual learning event. Regardless of an encouraging atmosphere the students cannot always identify their

support needs. Discreet interference is sometimes needed. What is expected from all the roles related to student support is sensitivity. This means that the persons holding these roles should be able to analyse the situations on the course and recognize the support needs.

7.2.1 *Teacher*

The role of teacher encompasses activities that occur through the whole of the learning event, from planning to feedback and evaluation. This means that the person holding the role of teacher is usually the actor most involved with the course. Of course there can be many actors on the course responsible for the subject and guidance. In that case, like with every role, the teacher’s activities can also be divided among many persons. For example, one actor may be more involved with pedagogical planning while another actor answers students’ questions and provides information.

When the activities of the teacher are examined, it is clear that these activities can be identified in face-to-face –teaching, too. What is different in the ODL courses is the way these activities are performed. For example, leading learning dynamics in an e-learning course is a different process from that in a classroom situation. What is needed from the actor is the understanding of the ODL, the differences and demands it sets for the activities.

THE ACTIVITIES OF TEACHER

PEDAGOGICAL PLANNING

Activities

- To create a schedule.
- To define the rules of the work.
- To implement the rules of the work.
- To create and apply the pedagogy of the learning event.
- To choose suitable pedagogical methods.
- To create activities and assignments.

Pedagogical planning connects two ODL processes: planning and student support. In the planning phase, the structure of the whole course is defined and the basis of pedagogy and methods are therefore decided. The teacher is responsible for the pedagogy of the learning event, i.e. to choose suitable pedagogical methods and to create activities and assignments to support the learning. After that the precise schedule and rules for working are created.

The structure and schedule are created based on the objectives and contents of the course. In e-learning courses the schedule has to be planned by taking into consideration the special characteristics of the used technology. For example, discussions usually take more time on the web than in face-to-face situations, especially if they are asynchronous. If the course is very interactive, there should be enough time for the students to read discussions and react to them.

A common mistake in scheduling is that the time span of the course is too short compared to the required tasks. On the other hand the intensity of discussion may be lost, if the time span is too long. Time management and the balance of workload are the key factors in the success of an ODL course.

The teacher has to decide whether to create a flexible schedule with a possibility for modifications or whether to create a predefined schedule. A course based on material and self-study can have a more flexible schedule than a course based on interaction. The planner should also make enough time for the teachers' work, for guidance and for evaluation.

Common rules support all actors, especially in confusing situations. To avoid an oppressive atmosphere rules should be understood more as instructions than restrictions. Common rules help students to identify the principles concerning the evaluation, credits and for example, interaction. The students should be informed about the required tasks, deadlines of these tasks and the consequences of missing the deadlines. There should also be a shared understanding of the objectives of the course and the means to achieve these goals.

The rules are not created just for the student, but should also include the tasks of the teacher. For example, the teacher should inform the students

of the deadlines for answering their questions or evaluating their assignments. Explicit rules and principles of the course can prevent the confusion and frustration which may sometimes occur.

A way to motivate students to follow the rules is to consult them when the rules are created. This is also a way to activate students in common discussion. In big groups, the inclusion of the students' opinions is impossible, but even then it is good to remember that there should be alternative ways to carry out the course.

Pedagogical planning includes the choice of suitable pedagogical methods. This means methods to teach the subject, ways to activate the students in learning and tools for organising the learning event and work. Pedagogical methods can vary according to the objectives and content of the course or according to the group of students, and they reflect the teachers' perspectives towards learning. The learning environment should also be created to support these perspectives.

Concerning the quality of the whole course, important choices are made in this phase. Pedagogical planning sets the structure for the whole course, and therefore it is the activity that affects the success of the whole learning event.

FAMILIARIZATION

Activities

- To provide information about the course.
- To explain the learning methodology and methods.
- To familiarize students with the learning environment.
- To explain the singularities and special characteristics of ODL.

The activities related to familiarization are an important part of student support, and the success of these activities has an effect on other support activities, especially on guidance. For example, if the students are familiar with the virtual learning environment there may be fewer problems later on.

Adequate information is a way to avoid wrong impressions or expectations concerning the course. The students should be informed about the objectives, evaluation, grading, deadline etc. Also information concerning the duties of different actors with their contact information should be available for the students.

It is important to familiarize students with ODL and the virtual learning environment. A new learning environment can even hinder learning if there is no understanding of ODL or knowledge on how to interact and study in a virtual learning environment. Initiation plays a significant part for the students, especially for beginners with ODL. Familiarization with the learning environment should be taken into account in scheduling, too. An introduction period can be useful.

Pedagogical planning aims at creating a proper structure for the learning event. Familiarization is about activities that prepare students to follow this structure. From the quality aspect, these constitute the foundations for learning and are important steps to take before starting the actual learning event.

GUIDANCE IN SUBJECT MATTERS

Activities

- To teach the subject.
- To answer subject related questions.
- To motivate the learner in the accomplishment of the subject objectives.

The teacher is responsible for subject related support. The teaching of the subject is an important part of this responsibility, but for ODL and student support, guidance is emphasized. The teacher offers guidance and can motivate students by asking subject related questions, giving assignments and introducing the additional materials.

If there is no face-to-face, meetings, lectures and seminars have to be replaced by other methods and new innovations are welcomed when teaching the subject to the students. The quality of material and assignments is emphasized and interaction is organised by the virtual tools. ODL encourages the inquiry and problem-based methods. This requires that the teacher is more of a supporter of the students' learning process. At higher education

level, learning through research is naturally one of the objectives, anyway.

What is important when examining quality is that the goal of this activity, i.e. learning the contents of the course, is supported. This requires that the students receive enough resources, material, information etc. related to the subject, to work with, and enough support when working with these resources.

LEADING THE LEARNING PROCESS

Activities

- To help the students to elaborate personalised learning plans.
- To lead learning dynamics
- To ensure completion of the learning assignments with the students.
- To activate and promote the participation of the students.

Besides being an expert on the subject matter, the teacher is the leader of learning dynamics. In ODL the teacher's role as a facilitator is emphasized. Besides infrastructure, the structure of guidance also has to be designed before the learning event.

One important thing is to find balance in participation. The teacher has to be present without dominating the learning process. The teacher's role is to guide the learning process in the right direction. Keeping up the dynamics and motivation means observing the students' work and progress. The virtual learning environment usually offers tools for monitoring the students' participation. It is fair to inform students about this, too.

Some parts of the guidance can be delegated to tutors and also peer support can be expected from the students, especially with collaborative working methods. In this case the teacher still has to observe the course and intervene if necessary.

Student participation can be promoted by questions and arguments. The students may also need help with the assignments. The basic structure of guidance can be planned beforehand, but the need for support varies with every group and the individual students in the course.

Personal learning plans help the students to express their goals and support needs, to identify

possible blocking factors in learning and also to plan and schedule their activities on the course. The learning plans can be formal and made individually or they can be carried out through open discussion with the whole group. This has a lot to do with the institution's own practices. It is important that the formal objectives of the course are implemented and they are in sync with the objectives of the students.

With a new learning environment new student and teacher roles are also introduced. The success of guidance largely relies on understanding these new roles. For example, the teacher may try to promote the students' problem-solving abilities by allowing them to find the information themselves for their questions, and at the same time the students expect the teacher to give them the correct answers and essential information related to the questions. This contradiction may cause frustration and lower motivation towards the course. The teacher should make sure the students understand their responsibilities and the underlying pedagogy.

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

Activities

- To use instruments for continuous assessment.
- To give feedback from the assessment as soon as possible.
- To assure the final evaluation.

Most virtual learning environments offer tools for evaluation and assessment. Information about student's activities is recorded and data about performances can be found. The students should be aware of what kind of information is recorded about their activities and how this is used in evaluation.

When the focus is on the students' individual work, it is useful to give personal feedback to each student, but when group work is emphasized, the teacher can give feedback to the whole group at the same time. Regarding group feedback, the students should still be regarded as individuals, and they should be able to express their opinions of the group's performance.

It is important that the students also get feedback during the learning event, not just after it. Especially

with a new subject or with new working methods, continuous feedback is important for ensuring the students' progress. From the students' point of view feedback can be considered as the teacher's expression of interest towards their work. This requires of course that the feedback is reasonable and constructive. The feedback must be unambiguous, and the students should be able to ask specifying questions regarding the feedback. The risk of wrong interpretations of feedback is greater in ODL where the feedback is usually given in a written rather than in a face-to-face situation where immediate discussion is possible.

Evaluation is closely linked to quality assurance and a way of collecting information for the basis of the development of the course. The evaluation of the past course and developing the new course are intertwined processes. Analysing student feedback, evaluating their progress and learning and taking into account the success of the whole course provides a lot of information about the quality of the course as a whole.

7.2.2 Tutor

A tutor is a mediator between an institution and its students. This means that the tutor should be aware of the students' progress, needs and problems to pass this information on to other actors, and also to inform the students about the course. A connection with other roles, like those of a teacher and technical support, is thus required. Both in the teacher's and the tutor's role, guidance is emphasized. The line between the tutor and the teacher can thus be hard to draw.

The tutor works more on the students' terms. This means that while the teacher has a clear agenda, like answering students' questions related to the subject in question or leading learning dynamics, the tutor's role has more to do with helping the students in situations that occur during the course. This is done by first analysing the situations and then reacting to them.

Tutoring in a virtual learning environment usually relies on textual support and there are no non-verbal clues to interpret. This requires a reliable connection between the students and the tutor, to convey the questions, expression of ideas, and

the sense of an easily approachable support. A key activity of the tutor is therefore to facilitate the learning community. The tutor is also expected to be familiar with the learning environment and other software of the course and to have knowledge about guidance in the new learning environment.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TUTOR

MOTIVATION

Activities

- To motivate the students in learning
- To promote an atmosphere that supports learning and participation
- To make the students feel part of the educational community

In ODL the need for technical support is so evident that the support of other aspects of the learning process is sometimes forgotten. ODL is based on the concept of a self-directed learner. This does not take away the fact that most students still need encouragement and support.

The responsibility of the tutor is to create a positive atmosphere for the course. This motivates the students to learn and to cope better with possibly forthcoming problems. Even though the tutor is not necessarily in charge of creating and designing the course, s/he should be aware of the course goals to support the students in achieving these goals.

Besides personal support, there are other ways to promote student motivation. One is to give students the chance to choose between alternative learning paths, i.e. to choose between materials, themes and activities. Activating elements, like assignments, group work etc., and regular feedback are also ways of motivating students. The students' commitment to the course is increased by allowing them to participate in decision-making. This can be collective negotiation of the rules or self-evaluation.

The main objective of the tutor is to promote the creation of the learning community. Sometimes this is formed naturally, but especially at the beginning of the course the students may need encouragement. Various methods, like informal

chat discussions, group activities and introductions can be used, but the most important thing is to encourage interaction between the students. The tutor acts as a facilitator of a learning community which is not controlled or managed by a tutor or a teacher, but which is operated by the participation of the students. The tutor has to communicate this to the students. At the beginning the tutor may have to participate more to activate the students, but s/he has to remember to move to the background when the students take on the discussion. Over enthusiastic interference can also cause passivity. The emphasis is on balance.

GUIDANCE

Activities

- To offer guidance if needed.
- To answer questions about the course or to transfer the addressed questions to the right person (i.e. questions about administrative issues).

An atmosphere on the course should be created so that it is easy for students to ask for support. The tutor should show attention to the students' activities and progress. This is done by the right level of participation. Participation is made visible through messages, instructions and by feedback. Even though e-Learning courses are flexible in time, the students cannot expect support to be available 24 hours a day. Therefore it is important to make rules for the support as well.

It is important to let the students know right from the beginning what they can expect from the tutor. The tutor should let the students know how soon they can expect answers to their questions, how they are expected to contact the tutor, what the tutor's role is in discussions etc. The tutor's time resources should be taken into account when planning the working methods of the course. For example, one way to ease the tutor's workload is to assign the students to take responsibility for discussion by rotating the role of moderator amongst the students.

The teacher and the tutor should plan their roles before the course. The students should be informed about the differences between these roles. The teacher's responsibility is guidance on subject

matters, and the leading of the whole process. The tutors are more involved in the relations, interaction and individual situations in the learning process. Tutors are often considered as part of the learning community, and the relationship with the students can be informal. Tutors are not necessarily members of the personnel, they can be students themselves. This can be beneficial to both the tutor and the students.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR INTERACTION AND COLLABORATIVE WORK

Activities

- To manage problems or conflicts.
- To promote functional interaction between the students and staff.

The tutor's role is to activate and guide students to participate in interaction. For discussions to be productive the participants need to be active. Discussions do not happen without a reason or an impulse. The topic or theme of the discussion should be interesting and thought provoking. The tutor should monitor the discussions and intervene if needed. The tutor can act as an example on how to communicate with each other. Messages can be argumentative or provocative to instigate the discussion, but respect towards others is expected.

The capacities of different interaction tools should be taken into account. The interaction tools are chosen depending on the objectives and other characteristics of the course. For example, a discussion using asynchronous tools requires more time than with synchronous tools, but because of the slow pace of discussions it can be more in-depth. The schedule of the interaction and discussions should be well planned.

Even though learning is in focus, all the interaction does not have to be related to the subject at hand. Especially in courses where there are no face-to-face meetings social interaction should be encouraged. There could be, for example, a chat-forum for unofficial discussions. Usually this encourages subject related discussions, too. The importance of a good, relaxed atmosphere should not be underestimated.

Discussions between students in a large group can be exhausting and hard to control. Forming smaller

groups and group work in general is emphasized in ODL. In the face-to-face situations the group is often formed subliminally, without extra effort. This means that by chatting with other students in the classroom and by subtle gestures students form a group. In other words just by entering the classroom the students become members of a particular group. This is not the case in ODL where the students are usually present to others only by writing or participating in action. That is not to say that in a face-to-face situation a good atmosphere and the sense of group exists automatically, but in the virtual learning environments tools are needed for it. If face-to-face meetings are not included in the course, it will be useful to spend time before the learning event on introductions and to become acquainted with other students and the learning environment.

The tutor guides the forming of groups and their work. The tutor has to understand the special characteristics of ODL with their requirements for group work and socialization. Group work in the virtual learning environment needs extra guidance and support to succeed. Special attention should be paid to forming the groups in order to promote co-operative and collaborative learning and genuine sharing of expertise.

The groups should be able to organise their work collectively to increase the commitment and responsibility of the members. The groups should be in charge of their work. Of course this can be supported by instructions for working, roles inside the groups or by questions to the group. The groups may be obliged to report about their work, especially the dynamics of the group. This helps tutors to analyse the needs for support but it also helps the students to observe their work.

One aspect of interaction is the maintaining of contact throughout the course. The course structure and schedule of the course affect the dynamics of interaction. There may be periods when the interaction is lower, but the connection should not be lost. It is important for the tutor to be capable of analyzing the situations, and adjusting his/her behaviour and level of participation accordingly.

7.2.3 Coordinator

A coordinator has an important role in courses organised by many different institutions together or a large group of actors. In courses like these there must be someone coordinating the different elements and supervising the implementation of the whole course. The role of the coordinator connects activities from the planning, administration, student support, material production and evaluation processes. In courses where most activities are carried out by one or just a few actors, this role is more or less invisible and integrated with other roles. Still these activities should be taken into account.

The coordinator is also responsible for the connections outside the course. This means other actors or networks from inside the institution or from the field. The coordinator should also have good knowledge of the institution, its systems, infrastructure, support units and actors. An individual course is part of the institution's structure, and the resources of the institutions should be taken advantage of.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COORDINATOR

ADVISE

Activities

- To give general advice on the methodology for following ODL.
- To give general information on the institution.
- To offer guidance and support to other actors in the course.
- To give general advice on the methodology for following ODL.
- To give general information on the institution.
- To offer guidance and support to the personnel.

The coordinator dispels general doubts, which are not related to specific subjects and advises the

students on the structure of studies and possible study paths. This means general advice about the institutional services and systems.

Besides student guidance, there should also be guidance for the personnel. This is an important thing from the perspective of quality. The coordinator offers guidance to all the actors on the course. The coordinator informs and educates the actors, such as tutors, about the course objectives, methodology and responsibilities. Info or meetings prior to the beginning of the course is a good way to discuss objectives and guidelines.

There should be shared understanding also about the manners, rules, means to contact the students and etiquette. When many actors are involved in guidance, their performance should be in sync. For example, in a case where students are divided in subgroups with their personal tutor, the students should be treated the same way regardless of who the tutor is.

Students can have problems related to their studies and administration. These problems are not related to a specific course, so the tutors are not necessarily capable of helping the students. The tutor can direct these questions to the coordinator. Even if the coordinator is an actor who is not otherwise involved with guidance, the students should have a way to contact the coordinator. There may also be a period after registration and before the actual learning event when all the institutional or administrative questions and problems are taken care of.

COORDINATION

Activities

- To coordinate the different aspects of the course.
- To integrate pedagogical issues with technical aspects.
- To control training material delivery.
- To supervise the work of the staff
- To manage conflicts between students and tutors or teachers.

ODL courses usually consist of many different parts. Materials, assignments, interaction, guidance and support and the learning environment should all be in balance and promote the quality of the

course. In many cases there can even be different actors responsible for these different aspects. Good coordination ensures the balance of the elements.

One important part of the coordination is to ensure that the pedagogical methods are compatible with the technological solutions of the course. In the end the coordinator is responsible for the decisions. What is expected from the coordinator is good relations and interaction with other actors in the course, understanding the ODL and technology and knowledge about the institution.

CONNECTIONS

Activities

- To manage connections with the actors inside the institution.
- To manage connections with the actors outside the institution.
- To assess the impact of training.

Besides the relationship to the actors in the course, the coordinator should create connections to other resources related to the course. An individual course is part of the institution's educational structure, and usually a part of a larger degree. The connections to the actors inside the institution can be an important resource for an individual course. Sharing knowledge should work both ways. The coordinator should also inform the actors inside the institution about the course and about the experiences gained. This information should also be visible for the management of the institution.

In the higher education area the actors often have good connections outside the institution, to actors in their own field. These connections can be an extra resource for the course. For example, there is usually shared material that can be used on the course. Actors from other institutions can also participate as experts to the course. Some courses are even produced and delivered together with other institutions. Coordination becomes crucial to success.

The coordinator is involved with the course from the beginning of the course to its end. Thus, the coordinator can assess the impact of the training from the students' point of view as well as from the institution's point of view.

7.2.4 Administrative support

Administration is usually the backbone of every learning event. Administrative support can be organised centrally in the institution where individual courses are part of degree studies or otherwise connected to the institution. Administrative support is connected to an individual course by collecting the data and managing registration and record. The activities of administrative support are naturally mostly linked to the administration process, but they are also connected to student support through support services and information.

THE ACTIVITIES OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

REGISTRATION

Activities

- To provide relevant information on ODL specificities to potential students before registration to a course.
- To manage registration.

Administrative support is responsible for registration, and the information related to it. Registration is usually dependent on the systems and policies of the organising institution. Digital registration forms and systems can be used or registration can be performed in a more traditional way. Usually the registration of an individual course is integrated with the existing administration systems. If a course is not obligatory for students, the information about the course given to them before the course forms the basis for the decision to participate in the course. Sufficient information also ensures that expectations are realistic.

RECORDS

Activities

- To update the academic file of each student.
- To manage the students' records and grades.
- To file the students' records appropriately.

Like registration, the institutions' existing systems and policies usually bind the managing of student records. The students' rights of privacy and the laws of data security must be considered when handling student records. The actor responsible for the records should be aware of these rules related to filing and keeping student records. This ensures the protection of students' rights.

ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

Activities

- To link the specific course with the institution's strategy
- To link the specific course with the institution's systems
- Practical arrangements

In a course there are also other administrative tasks related to course production and delivery. These activities vary depending on the institution. It is the task of administrative support to make sure that the administrative tasks required by the organising institution are taken care of. This can mean reporting the key figures to the institution's administration or documenting the feedback from students. Administrative support ties the course to the institution.

There are a lot of practical arrangements, like arranging space for meetings etc. that need to be taken care of before and during the course. Also the virtual learning environment brings special requirements for the arrangements to be considered.

7.2.5 Technical support

The role of technical support in ODL is central. Even when most of the work of the technical support is usually done outside the actual learning event, the lack of technical support is soon noticed. Technical problems can have a surprisingly big influence on the students' experience of the course as a whole, and even their attitudes towards ODL in general. Unsolved technical problems can cause

frustration, complicate learning or even cause dropouts. Therefore even if the problems are not solved right away, it is important to let the students know that someone is taking care of the problem.

Technical support can be organised in various ways. In some cases there is a person or a unit in the institution responsible for technical support in every course, and in other cases the activities are carried out by someone who holds other roles too.

The activities of technical support are related to many processes. There are administrative and planning tasks and activities related to students' support and organising material delivery. Like with previous roles, the activities of technical support can be divided between the actors responsible for this area.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TECHNICAL SUPPORT

DESIGNING THE TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Activities

- To organise the virtual learning environment (VLE) and other technological tools

The technical support role is responsible for designing and administering the technical infrastructure. In some cases there is a person or a unit in the institution responsible for this activity in every course. Centralised technical support services for institutions can be an important resource for an individual course. The actor who otherwise is not involved with the course can deal with the role of technical support. In this case the technical support is participating only when needed. Even then the technical support should be aware of the different elements in the course that may require support.

The technical support can also assist in planning the technical structures in the course. Organising the technical tools and learning environments requires an understanding of the features these tools bring to a learning event. A close connection between the technical support and other actors is required.

PERSONAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Activities

- To answer questions about the virtual learning environment
- To create and maintain a FAQ or otherwise make

regular reviews of the problems encountered by the users and possible solutions

- To prevent typical students' problems
- To provide information

The students' technical skills and available technical infrastructure should be taken into account when planning the technical support services. If the group is very heterogeneous regarding technical skills, personal support is needed. If the students are all at the same level, a training session for the whole group can be useful.

Usually the technical support is able to predict the technical problems or difficulties that may occur in the course. There may be advance instructions, FAQ etc. regarding these situations addressed to all the students, and in addition a help desk service for the students who need personal support. The technical support should indicate to the students that questions and problems are solvable and encourage the students to express their problems.

Before the beginning of the course the students should receive information about the required hardware and software. Good instructions and information at the beginning of the course can prevent many technical problems and increase the positive attitude towards learning and the use of technology.

SOLVING TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

Activities

- To attend and solve problems of the network, server and connections
- To solve hardware problems
- To solve software problems
- To deal with technical problems within the VLE.

The technical support is responsible for preventing technical problems which can complicate the learning process. These problems can be related to hardware, software, or they can be problems with the learning environment. Usually the connections and servers are used collectively in the institution, and in such a case support for these is also provided by the institution.

The technical support answers the students' questions concerning technical problems. Students

should be encouraged to use technical support, and in the case of technical problems a quick support response is expected. If the technical support is not otherwise involved with the course, there can be a separate discussion forum for technical questions or a specific tool to contact the technical support. Instructions and rules on how to act in case of technical problems should be explained to the students.

ACCESS CONTROL

Activities

- To guarantee the protection of privacy and intellectual property.
- To give access keys to the VLE.
 - To give access keys to the library and other additional material. To manage access.
- To stop non-registered users from accessing the students' work in collaborative spaces.

Access control is important especially when using a virtual learning environment, where all the students' activities in the course, such as discussions and assignments, are in the same area. Access control prevents non-registered users from accessing the students' work. The means to protect privacy should be clear to all actors and also to the students. This will ensure a reliable and trustworthy atmosphere. The students should know what will happen to the data about their performances after the course.

The institution could offer services, like databases in the library, which require access keys. The access keys and identifications for these services are usually connected to other information systems in the institutions.

7.3 Creating quality in learning material design and production

When examining the kinds of roles and activities included in the process of learning material design and production, the natural starting point is to think about teacher's work, when s/he plans and implements a course. The first thing to do is to figure out what the students already know or what skills they have and what they are supposed to

know or to be able to do after the learning. This deliberation leads to the production, selection and acquisition of subject matter. The next step is the design of the learning event. Whether the learning event is a class, a lecture course, a seminar with essays, a laboratory with exercises or something else, the teacher at this stage defines the pedagogical approach, the work required by the students and the appropriate exercises and exams to check the student's learning. All of this the teacher puts in a timeline for the learning event and plans the proper places for teaching, studying and evaluating.

This is simply common sense about learning material design and production. However, when we stop to think about it, we soon notice that there are several other people involved in the process as well as other processes having an impact on design and production. Firstly, the process does not appear out of nowhere, but is preceded by the decision of the teacher or the department or specific unit in question to deliver education on that particular subject matter. Here, another process, which we may call the planning process or the curriculum design process feeds into the learning material design and production as its initial condition. Contemplating the level of knowledge and skills required from the students to be recruited, the teacher may contact the student administration for information, thus entering the process of administration.

Certain other processes affect learning material design and production. Teaching in the field of higher education is based on scientific research. When a teacher chooses the subject matter, it is usually based on his/her own research or field of interest and more broadly the field of science the teacher is involved in. Here the preparation of learning materials encounters another process, namely that of scientific research, especially the dissemination and publication of scientific findings. To utilize this process in learning material design and production, the teacher uses his/her own research results, core texts and scientific publications in his/her own field of science and may contact librarians, computer analysts, archivists and fellow scientists. To set up his/her course, the teacher may consult support persons and experts on pedagogy, technology, instructional design, information management etc. At this point learning material design and production crosses e.g. the processes of administration, information management and

technology.

Producing the materials for a learning event is one of the most important activities a teacher has in higher education. Well-planned notes for lectures, useful and digestible readers, meaningful examples, appropriate exercises and an appropriate exam make up successful learning events. Seldom teachers are not fortunate enough to have subject matter experts to help them prepare and revise the scientific material into a suitable form for learning purposes, so they have to trust their own abilities and sense in preparing these phases of learning material production and design. During these phases the teacher also briefs tutors, assistant teachers and staff plus students in the ways of using material to facilitate learning. In workflow mode, the design and production of learning material in traditional teaching is presented in the following diagram.

7.4 The roles and activities of the learning material design and production

When ODL is added to the learning material design and production, some additional features enter the process.

The information has to be found in different formats, the digital resources have to be located, the costs of usage have to be determined, the content has to be realistically seized, media elements have to be constructed and inserted, usability tested, e.g. The inclusion of digital contents and delivery tools necessitates the modification of existing roles and the incorporation of a number of new ones, when the objective is the high quality of the learning material and finally the learning event.

7.4.1 Learning Material Designer

The role of learning material designer is emphasized not only because of new digital tools and resources but also because the number of intervening factors affecting the learning process grows with the utilisation of information technology. The more penetrated the learning material is by the means of information technology, the more important the quality of learning material design. The question

here is not only about giving instructions for efficient learning as is the case in instructional design. Learning material design covers issues from the retrieval of information through to the planning of resources and structure to pedagogical approaches and finally to the proprietary rights of the materials in use.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LEARNING MATERIAL DESIGNER

Activities

- Information retrieval
- Planning of resources for learning
- Planning of learning material structure
- Planning of pedagogical approach used in material
- Planning of tools, saving methods and delivery for the material
- Taking care of copyright issues

Apparently the digitalisation of scientific materials is one of the most advanced results of the progress of information and communication technology in higher education. The development of digital library systems, electronic journals, reference knowledge bases, databases of scientific articles, digital scientific publishing and open repositories of learning materials have immensely increased the attainability of scientific knowledge. All this flood of information emphasises the need for skills in finding and evaluating knowledge, which makes information retrieval one of the most important parts of learning material design.

Information retrieval connects learning material design into a number of other processes. Firstly, the progress of scientific knowledge is presented in the content of digital information resources. Here the scientific process feeds learning material design and production. Secondly, the information is usually administered by scientific libraries or other bodies that collect and deliver knowledge in and between scientific communities. This connects learning material design to the information process of science. Thirdly, the development and maintenance of the skills needed for finding knowledge link learning material design to the general process of information retrieval, e.g. the development of

increasingly efficient search engines. The successful absorption of these processes into information retrieval ends up with knowledge that is real time and appropriate for the level of the learners. All this is essential for the good quality of learning materials in ODL.

After finding the available knowledge the designer has to plan how these resources can be used. Many providers of digital scientific materials set limits for the utilisation of their materials, e.g. by delimiting the usage to the domain area of the client organisation or demanding specific access keys. In this case the materials can be accessed only from the computers of the organisation or the users have to obtain the access privileges.

Also the utilised format of the digital materials affects the planning of resources for learning. The used file formats affect both the production of learning materials and the learners' access to the materials. A well known example of this is the Portable Document Format (pdf), which is used to guarantee that the content of file can not be changed by the user, but which requires specific reader software (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Reader) to be accessible. In addition, all virtual learning environments (VLEs) set limitations to the usage of file formats, e.g. some require html, and some accept a number of file formats once the corresponding software are installed on the user's computer.

The learning material designer has to cope with the abundance of information. As noted above the digitalisation of scientific materials has opened access to scientific knowledge in a way never seen before. This may lead to including too many resources into the learning material thus encumbering the learner and endangering the quality of learning. So, in design the proper sizing of the resources is as important as the prioritizing of resources. The latter, i.e. determining the order of importance also has a pedagogical dimension. It is crucial to give instructions to the learner on how and in what order s/he is supposed to learn.

The planning of learning resources links the process of material design and production into a number of other processes. Taking care of access privileges connects the design to the process of proprietary rights. Choosing the proper file formats relates to the information technology process, i.e. especially the development of different kinds of

digital tools and their penetration into everyday usage in higher education. The selection and prioritising of resources relates material design to the pedagogical process, i.e. the necessary pedagogical changes needed to guarantee the high quality of learning in the ODL.

The learning materials in ODL can be structured in a large variety of ways. The well known and earliest of these is the linear page structure from beginning to end resembling the structure of a book. In it the material starts from the first page and the pages can be navigated, i.e. “turned” up to the last one. This mostly text-based structure is still widely used, when text to be read by learners is uploaded onto web-pages. Most if not all the resources provided by scientific publishing are structured in this way. The linear structure is the simplest way of structuring web-based learning materials, but allows no interaction and the inspiring effects depend solely on the contents of the text.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) introduced another way to organise learning materials by inserting links inside the text or on specific media elements (pictures, icons, graphics, etc.) leading to other parts of text or completely separate materials. This non-linear structure, i.e. hypertext, which is familiar from all the web-pages, allows the structuring of learning material into different paths, which the learner can spontaneously take. The freedom of navigation through the material gives the learner more control over her/his learning, when deciding in which order to acquaint him/herself with the contents and which parts need a second look.

In actual fact HTML was and still is the backbone of web-based learning. In the beginning it showed great promise, because it seemed that every piece of digital information could be linked and delivered to the learners, once transformed into HTML. However, it soon became obvious that there were a number of blocking factors, which hindered the rapid deployment of web-based learning founded solely on HTML. These factors still exist and have to be noted when designing the structure of learning materials.

Firstly, the coding of web-pages is time consuming although the development of editor software and converters has eased the situation significantly. In design this sets limits to the complexity of learning

material to be produced.

Secondly, the web-pages have to be uploaded, administered and updated on a web server, which requires special skills. Failing to administer the learning materials on a server soon destroys the advantages gained by free navigational structure, when the contents become outdated, external links stop functioning etc.

Thirdly, there is the nature of hypertext temps including a lot of different kinds of resources into the learning material. Without accurate instructions the resulting homogenous structure may drown the learner in a flood of knowledge thus resulting in poor quality learning. To avoid this in structuring learning material, the significance of different materials has to be pinpointed.

Fourthly, static web-pages based on HTML allow no interactivity, which means that the learner is basically alone with the material with no means to ask for elucidation in the case of brain teasers. This is due to the fact that HTML is a description language for hypertext, which cannot as such be used to construct tools for interaction in a web environment.

The difficulties with static web-pages for learning material design and production soon led to the construction of virtual learning environments (VLEs), which at the first stage were designed to structure the materials and allow some interactivity. This was done by giving material designers the opportunity e.g. to choose from a number of templates of ready structures and some functionalities like asynchronous discussions, functioning much like sending and receiving e-mail between a group of people, or online relay chats joining learners in real-time discussion using keyboards for communication. The qualitative change in the development of VLEs came with the progress of programming and script languages for web development, which permitted the construction of dynamic web-pages and also of complete e-learning platforms.

Virtual learning environments can now combine a great number of resources and activities, which have an important effect on the planning of learning material structure. On or with the help of VLE many kinds of learning events may be produced starting from lecture-like courses with exams up to very sophisticated problem based learning situations

with self tests, group work and peer evaluations. This multiplicity of options stresses the need to plan the structure of learning material so that that different resources and activities are balanced in the right proportion to facilitate learning. For example the designer must determine which kind of learning objects are to be included in the learning materials, their relationship with the other learning objects utilised and how other resources and tools back up the learning of the learner. The designer must know both the technological and pedagogical potential and restrictions of the VLE for the specific learning event s/he is designing.

Planning the structure of learning materials is linked to a number of processes. We noted above the way in which the development of information technology has determined the framework of the structure. Starting from a book-like structure and moving into more sophisticated ones with the development of hardware and software information technology has opened options to plan many kinds of learning events with the respective learning material structures . This progress has made the design of learning materials more complicated and more challenging at the same time as the pedagogical process has gained increasing weight in planning.

When looking at the pedagogical approaches used in web-base learning, one soon notices that the development of information technology tools condition the understanding of how learning happens, but at the same time the inherited experiences and conceptions of the educational practice live on. So, to a great extent the pedagogical choices and the choices of digital tools to be used go hand in hand.

At the beginning it was assumed that opening access to scientific knowledge in digital format via networking would be enough for the realisation of a new kind of higher learning. The pedagogical concept was the transformation of lecture-like “chalk and talk” situation into lecture materials published on the web, or delivering scientific articles and text books in digital format to learners with the help of databases and internet. The learner was seen as an independent and self-steering agent, who could find, choose and digest the materials needed for her/his education.

This thinking was in accordance with the level of technological development with static, mainly

text based web-pages allowing no possibilities for different forms of interaction and utilisation of digital tools for learning. The incorporation of means of interaction, e.g. course-specific e-mail, bulletin boards and chats together with group work, assignment, exam and self test tools into a bundled whole, i.e. a virtual learning environment change this situation considerably by increasing the freedom for many kinds of pedagogical choices which are largely conditioned by the tools available for learning.

When using VLEs texts and knowledge delivered with other media are still the basis of learning, but the designer can choose the tools which best suit the learners needs in a learning situation. The learner's needs, on one hand, are determined by the nature of the learning event and on the other hand by the style of learning . The designer has to plan the pedagogical approach of the learning materials so that they cohere with the nature of learning event. It is necessary to determine the level of learning, the type of material, e.g. introductory, core, additional, descriptive, analytical, theoretical, methodological, empirical etc., and suitable tools for working and learning with the material. So, the development of VLEs offers more freedom to design how the materials enabling learning are delivered and how the learner can best handle the learning situation. This also means that VLEs open up the inherited pedagogical perspectives when generating the learning event - platform – learner -specific pedagogies.

Taking care of the proprietary rights of learning materials may appear to be a rather complicated matter although the difficulties sometimes seem to be exaggerated. As noted above many providers of digital scientific materials impose restrictions on where and by whom the materials can be used. And the producers of learning materials, commercial as well as open access, often determine the ways in which materials can be utilised. Learning materials produced specifically for a learning event usually fall under the proprietary rights if not produced as part of the duties of the post, which means that the designer has to manage all the contractual matters.

7.4.2 Learning Material Producer

The role of learning material producer is the one responsible and holding the necessary skills to produce learning materials for a specific learning event. The most important things affecting the quality of learning material are general scientific knowledge and the producer's skill in generating up-to-date and pedagogically sound contents for the learners. The competences in content production largely depend on the quality of scientific education and experience of the producer. The competence of the producer bridges learning material design and production with the process of scientific research.

Writing texts of core content grounds the learning material, which demands expertise on the specific content usually determined by the curriculum. The level of students' basic knowledge as well as the nature of the learning event constricts the style of the learning material. At the basic level the approach and terminology used should be well-explained and backed up with reference materials as illustrations, dictionaries and vocabularies. At an advanced level the learning material should be supported with references as to the methods of finding, processing and generating knowledge. The learning material must also be in accordance with the nature of the learning event. The learning in a learning event can be based e.g. on individual construction of knowledge, on working as part of a group or team aiming at knowledge or on creation of knowledge under the tutelage of a teacher or a tutor.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LEARNING MATERIAL PRODUCER

Activities

- Defining expenses for production and users
- Setting goals for learning
- Creating contents according to the goals set
- Modifying and reusing the existing materials
- Determination of additional materials

The production costs for learning materials consist of many items. It is already common knowledge that it takes more time and effort than the production of materials for traditional learning. This is due to the fact that when the content of the material is ready, it has to be converted into and presented in a proper digital format. If this is done as part of the work duties, there has to be enough

time for the production to guarantee the quality of the material.

When ordered from an external producer the client should make sure that the producer has clear instructions, has enough time, and that the end product is compatible with the existing infrastructure of the client. Also the linking of core contents to external resources may cause expenses such as charges for computer time, licences and royalties.

When the learning material is ready, it is installed on a website or a VLE. The website or VLE administration may create expenses, e.g. the IT unit of the institution or the company in charge of hosting takes fees from the used disc space, maintained helpdesks, provided updates, user training, etc.

As noted above, the production of digital learning materials takes time, effort and money. The rule of thumb is that the production of learning materials for a single learning event should be considered carefully, if there are no special reasons, because the costs tend to be high. The development of VLEs has relieved this to some extent, because they provide a ready-made platform and a simple way to update and further develop learning materials. From the perspective of quality the recurrent learning events on VLEs seem to be the optimal case, because improvements based on gained experience feedback from students are easy to make.

The learning material produced can have a wider usage than just one particular course. Shifting towards learning objects and open access publishing materials, the production costs may lower considerably, when pieces of material can be circulated for multiple uses without additional costs. To enable this, text, picture, video and audio libraries are needed, which can be opened for the learning material producers of the entire institution or also to external users. Material producers should estimate how and on what prerequisites the content of the pieces can be used for the benefit of the whole institution.

With a lot of money and other resources it is easy to get good quality, but at the same time this raises the expenses per learner. The concept of best practice embodies an idea of bringing about good quality with affordable costs. This is all the more important if the learners have to pay for learning

materials.

7.4.3 Audio-visual planner

Nowadays materials are increasingly produced in digital format - especially when focusing on the ODL learning event. This highlights the visual appearance of materials and the use of different media. The look of the materials and the different media elements may support learning in various ways, but at the same time if done badly can jeopardize or hinder learning. With new technology and media choices, the role of the audiovisual planner comes into focus. Audiovisual planning should be done in parallel with writing and planning the contents of the material.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AUDIO-VISUAL PLANNER

Activities

- Planning and producing the audiovisual layout of the material
- Planning and producing navigation in the material with the help of different elements
- Inclusion of different media elements, e.g. picture, icons, graphic, voice, video, animation

When materials are in digital format, the role of visual planning and execution grows. Audio-visual planning deals with pictures, charts, animations, simulations, composition, typography and colours. Using a broader definition, audiovisual elements consist of everything the user can see from the display or hear when using the materials. The visual side of digital learning material cannot be overlooked. Students construct meanings from the contents they read, and the things they see. Thus, audiovisual elements affect learning whether this is expected or not.

Good audio-visual planning doesn't take away the importance of the contents. Even the most excellent visual execution doesn't work without the content, but together they can help students in achieving the goals set for the learning event. In the case of learning materials, audio-visual planning starts with the needs of stakeholders. The special characteristics of the group should be taken

into account: What kind of visual effects suit the students' social and cultural background? How are the different learning styles taken into account in visual planning?

The planner should also decide, what kind of visual aspects bring added value to the particular subject at hand. Audio-visual elements can enrich materials by illustrating the contents, and enhance understanding of the written text. They can also emphasize the essential, and help in browsing the material and perceiving the general view.

Audio-visual elements can facilitate learning by motivating and attracting students. They can also enhance the remembering of the contents learned. With audio-visual signpost, materials can appear to be more controllable and organized to students. This is important in order to avoid confusion with the optional navigation paths.

Audio-visual elements vary according to the media used. In some virtual learning environments the possibilities to affect navigation and visual appearance can be restricted. In designing the website, almost anything is possible, but the elements chosen should promote the goals of the material as a whole.

The audio-visual planner designs the general graphical look of the materials. This means the composition and structure of the material, colours, typography, shapes, pictures and other graphical elements. Graphical elements are not just ornaments, but by visual hints and signposts help students to navigate through materials and concentrate on the subject at hand. The audio-visual elements of the user interface give students the sense of controllability and help in conceptualization.

Colours can be a good way to attract attention and lead students to essential information. Colours can also clarify the structure of the material. If not used in the right way, colours can also complicate the reading. The perception of text from the different background colours varies greatly. Also visually impaired people should be taken into account. Dark and fussy background pictures should also be avoided.

Large pictures and images can delay the loading of the site. It is important that there is alternative text available for all the symbols, pictures or images. Materials should be readable with different kinds of computers and browsers. Also the printing of the

materials should be promoted. In quality learning material, all the used elements are in balance, and all promote the main goal of the material, the learning of the contents.

The planning of navigation cannot be overlooked when materials are in digital form, especially in the form of a website. Websites rely on alternative paths that users can choose from. With poor navigation, the structure of the materials is lost. If navigation does work, or is confusing, students cannot find the materials or they lose their motivation. Navigation is also important in the virtual learning environment. Students should be able to distinguish different features, like activities, assignments, material etc., from one another. Navigation is a map across the materials. Location, destination and alternative paths should be clearly marked.

The basic structure of the website user interface highlights the home page and paths to different destinations with relative links. Links can be illustrated by text, bars, pictures, symbols, etc. Pictures and symbols are effective, but should contain “ALT” texts, that replace the picture if users are unable to open it. Navigation should be available on every page. Users may not start from the homepage.

Navigation can be done in various ways. Embedded links are popular, and they can be placed among text or other features. Breadcrumb trail helps the user to find a way back from the sub pages. Usually there is also a navigation bar, where the user can see the table of contents. With a large site, a site map, with direct links on every page, helps the user to navigate. If a large amount of text is placed on same page, page jumps to sections of page should be provided. This way the user avoids scrolling a long page. The site can also contain the search options. This way the user can find specific contents from a large site. It is better to use commonly used structures, than to be too original. Personal features can still be added on top of the basic structure.

Good navigation is intuitive, logical and well structured. The most important thing is consistency. The user soon learns to interpret the hints you give. Where is the navigation bar placed in your site? What are the links like? Are you using colours to show different paths?

The basic idea with the inclusion of different media elements is that all the chosen elements

should support each other, and the core goal: learning. Materials can consist of text, pictures, graphics, animation, sound and video. The choice between elements will rely on the content of the material as well as the characteristics of users. What media would suit the content? What is the best way to illustrate the subject? Students should be provided with different ways to access information. By using multiple media elements, differences in learning styles are promoted.

The basic element, also in materials with multimedia, is the text. It supports the other elements, and can be supported by them. It should be remembered that users interpret pictures and symbols in a different ways. Text usually carries fewer possibilities for misinterpretation. Images, pictures, graphics animations, help the comprehension of the text. They can also highlight the essential and be more memorable than text. Images can be used to motivate and attract attention. Auditory learners prefer tapes and video materials. Audio and video materials are also crucial for learning of some disciplines. With them, simulations and demonstrations can be provided.

When choosing between different media elements, restrictions should be taken into account. The use of new technology also requires that the users of the materials, not only the producer, have the proper software and hardware. The choice of elements is usually dependent on the resources, know-how, time, money etc., available. In the inclusion of media elements, the available technology should be taken into account. Also technical support and guidelines should be provided to students.

7.4.4 Usability planner

The most common problem with early web pages and first versions of virtual learning environments was their poor usability. There were two interconnected problems; the technical difficulties to establish easy to use interfaces and the still inadequate skills of users. The websites were book like with navigation from one page to another and virtual learning environments were bundles of tools like web pages, mailing lists and bulletin boards. These two intermingled problems led to usability testing and to understanding how a good interface

should function and what pedagogical activities and resources a virtual learning environment should contain.

Although the adoption and inclusion of new scripting languages has considerably eased the technical problems and the sharpening of the users' skills has lowered the threshold of utilising ODL, the usability of digital learning materials is still a crucial question. It is realistic to assume that a considerable number of drop outs from ODL can be explained by the poor quality of usability, because the difficulty or ease is the first thing a learner faces when entering a digital learning material.

THE ACTIVITIES OF USABILITY PLANNER

Activities:

- Mapping of skills and need for the learners for the development of user interface
- Planning of navigation and acting in the learning material
- Planning of delivery and saving methods for the learning material
- Usability testing of the learning material

The good quality of a digital learning material depends not only on the good quality of the content of the material. The learners must also have easy access to the contents without time delays. Usually the usage of learning materials is restricted by access privileges to a service or a particular course or content. Access should be organised so that all the potential learners reach the learning content with as few access keys as possible. To guarantee the flexibility promised by ODL, the learning services should be reachable in times suitable for the learner.

Usability largely depends on the functional organisation of the content, navigation and tools for learning. This is noted especially in the case of virtual learning environments (VLEs). As learning environments become more and more sophisticated from a pedagogical point of view instead of simply being delivery media for different kinds of contents, the smooth integration of navigation, contents and tools with which those contents can be worked on is emphasised. The usability planner has to check the clarity of navigation, the working of communication and feedback channels and the functionality of assignment, exercise and exam tools.

Data security is an important part of the quality

of usability. It aims at securing the information concerning contents or users from outsiders, i.e. securing the integrity of information. If the learning material or part of it is confidential the usability planner takes actions to guarantee that this is secured. The same applies to the information concerning the privacy of the users. Authenticity of information means that the delivery or the storage of information is done in such a way, that the content remains the same and the changes can be done only by proper authorisation. This requires that user monitoring has been well executed. The authenticity of the information should also be verifiable with the help of included metadata.

In its original sense usability meant the testing of technical functionality, which is still an important issue. It provides that the usability planner tests that the contents in different formats are compatible and can be accessed from different IT environments. For example the restrictions posed by the available bandwidth for the users or different formats of audio/video files demanding different players on the user's computer are things needing usability testing. Some of the problems revealed by testing learning materials can be overcome by tweaking the technology in use, but some cannot. Testing usability also produces material for support and instruction for the end users, which has to be generated and delivered by the usability planner.

7.5 Quality approach

ODL encompasses promises for better quality. An ability to support different learning styles and learning paths, the possibility for various forms of interaction and data recorded from the learning process for researching and examining the learning event are only a few of the possibilities promoting quality. The concern is how to implement these possibilities, and how to avoid the pitfalls of an overwhelming workload, technical problems and other cautionary examples connected to an unsuccessful ODL course. A suggestion presented in this text is to closely examine the activities, procedures and processes involved with the designing and delivery an ODL course.

Quality is sometimes considered as separate from the actual work done in courses. If quality is seen as

an extra burden or as something that is determined from outside, then the starting point for developing the learning event is not productive. The perspective here is to emphasize that quality work is integrated into normal activities. This is to say the same activities can be done in many ways. The approach here is to think about the best way of performing activities from the students' point of view.

The key is to examine the aspect, activities and processes that the learning event consists of and then think of how can these activities can be done in the best way to support learning. (*Annex 1.*) This approach enables the variation related to the organising institution, technical solutions or actors involved with the learning event. Institutions with existing quality work should also be considered. Maybe the activities and aspects of ODL are different from a traditionally organised learning event, but the perspective, supporting students' learning, can be the same.

PART 3: GENERATING QUALITY BY USING QUALITY TOOLS

8 QUALITY TOOLS

This chapter introduces quality criteria developed to support the evaluation and promotion of quality ODL. The purpose of quality criteria is to improve the quality of ODL by indicating the essential activities promoting quality in different processes. The criteria help actors to identify the aspects and elements essential for quality assurance, and also to recognize the best practices as well as the blocking factors.

This text is based on the knowledge produced in the e-Quality project. In the course of the project the general basis for assessing the quality of ODL was established, and the processes have been described and analysed in the participating institutions. The basis of the criteria is therefore the same as the main interest of the project: The quality of ODL.

8.1 *Criteria and indicators*

When the quality of education is examined, the crucial factors are the junctions, in other words, those moments when the student is interacting with the actors or institutions structures. This interaction

can be direct teaching and support, but quality is also experienced in circumstances, in organisational structures and in infrastructure. The student's life-cycle, study path, can be loosely connected to the institution. Learning also takes place elsewhere, but the organisation can only affect those occasions where students are in contact with the organisation and its actors. The actors can influence learning with activities and arrangements.

The focal points are:

- Criteria are developed to improve the quality of ODL from the students' point of view. Therefore the criteria focus on the actions enhancing students' learning.
- From the processes related to ODL, the e-Quality project has chosen two sub processes for closer examination. These are student support and learning material production. Criteria are created for these two sub processes.
- The e-Quality project examines quality from the actors' point of view and is introducing the concepts of role and activity to ODL. By identifying the roles the criteria for the activities of these roles can also be found.

The criteria are created for individual persons performing different roles, and they function as a means of self-evaluation. The evaluation of a

specific criterion is always an independent reasoning process. This means that the evaluation reflects the opinion of a person in a role. The quality criteria and their indicators should not be seen as separate aspects of education. The criteria are an elemental part of constructing learning events or learning objects and of strengthening the different processes necessary for modern higher education. Even in the traditional modes of education such criteria are always in place as an integral, unexpressed aspect of the cultural tradition of university teaching. Thus, the criteria and their indicators are not artificial tools or evaluation scales for ex post facto quality measurement, but guidelines and support media for the development of education in a new situation with new technologies.

Although the criteria are viewed through individuals, the criteria can also function as a means for quality assurance. The evaluation of different areas requires versatile expertise and therefore co-operation between the persons holding the different roles would be beneficial. In this case the evaluation may also promote the co-operation of different actors. In a group, the evaluation areas may be divided and the evaluations analysed together or all the evaluation areas may be evaluated together. Subjectivity does not mean that the evaluations of the criteria are not commensurable.

After the evaluation of role criteria, the actors should have a better view and understanding of the situation and success of that area. By comparing the views between the actors holding the different roles the understanding of the whole course and the success of the whole learning process can be achieved. The evaluation may function as a learning process for the whole team working with the course.

The work of the actors starts before the actual learning event. In frames set by the institution, the actors plan the course. By using the list of roles and activities, different aspects are recognised. Essential in this question is: What needs to be done in order to build a quality learning event? How are these tasks divided between the actors involved? The first checkpoint and evaluation, i.e. the use of criteria, comes after planning, and before the learning event.

All the actors should be involved. After checking the criteria there should still be time for changes according to the evaluation.

Even if all the aspects are thoroughly planned, it should be remembered that a course is not a static product, but a multidimensional interplay between different actors. The experience of the course is therefore affected by the motivation of the actors, earlier experiences and surrounding events. The context cannot be forgotten.

The students should be part of the team when evaluating the course. The use of criteria helps evaluation. The teacher can collect student feedback in many ways and this should be taken into account when checking the criteria. The feedback given by the students can also be taken into account at the third stage where the actors collect thoughts and ideas to support the development of the course or for forming the best practices.

8.1.1 Conceptual relations of quality criteria

As noted before, roles are for doing something, referred to here as an activity. The activities are performed to achieve outcomes. A person holding a role can evaluate the activity s/he is performing with the help of quality criteria. The relationships between roles, activities and quality criteria in the production of learning outcomes are described in Diagram 1 and, related to two sub processes, in Annex 4.

Here is a quality criterion that belongs to the sub process of student support. Its evaluative target is an activity called familiarization performed by a person in the role of a teacher. (*Example 1.*)

Every quality criterion is made up of a sentence revealing a state of affairs. The existence of this state of affairs is examined with the help of a number of indicators. Firstly, these indicators show the actions to be taken in that particular role to fulfil the activity. When we look at the indicators above, we see that a person in the role of teacher must give information concerning student support, deliver information about the duties and responsibilities of the teaching staff, facilitate students with relevant contact information, etc. If the teacher does not perform these actions, the quality of the learning

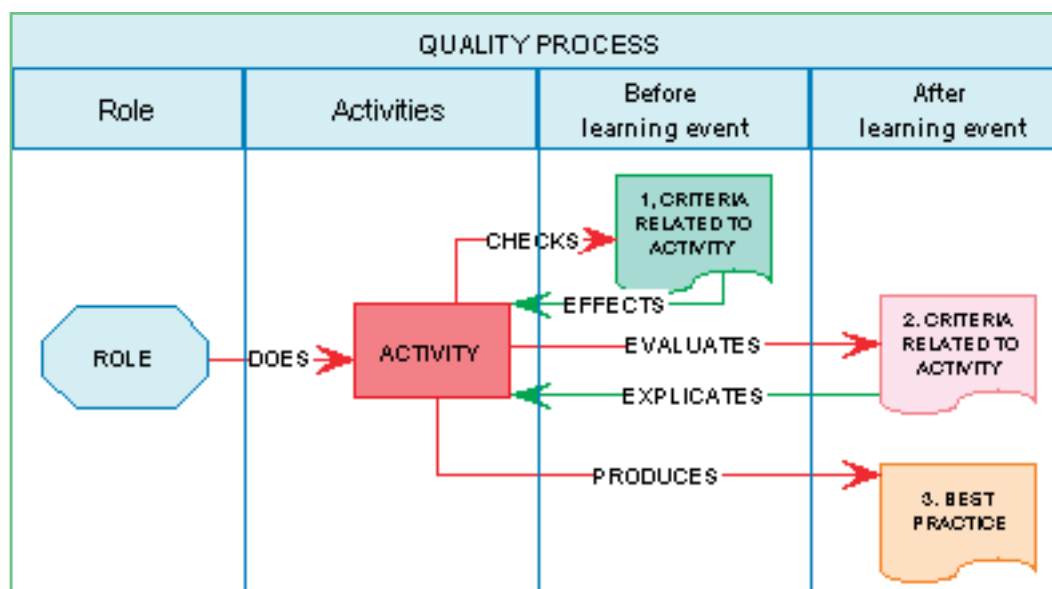


Diagram 1. Steps of using the criteria event is endangered. Secondly, the indicators imply a tool needed for performing the action, i.e. a medium for the delivery of information on student support, on the duties and responsibilities of different actors, on objectives of learning and evaluation and on grading learning results. It is obvious that the choice of tools is determined by the usefulness or fitness and availability of the tools for the actions fulfilling the activity.

- What actions do I have to take to fulfil this activity in order to guarantee the good quality of the learning event?
- What tools can I use and how should I use them to guarantee the good quality of the learning event?
- How can I generate the best practices for my work with the help of quality criteria?

EXAMPLE 1

Role: TEACHER

Activity: *Familiarization*

Criterion: **The students receive information about the course**

Indicators:

- The students receive information concerning the student support.
- The students receive information about the duties and responsibilities of the teaching staff and the different actors in the course.
- The students are provided with the actors' contact information.
- The objectives of the course are presented to the students before the course.
- The students receive information about the evaluation and grading of the course.

Here we can see how the activities and tools presuppose each other's highlighting the tools perspective on the information technology adopted and presented earlier in the chapter dealing with the roles, activities and tool. When using the quality criteria this means that in the rational process of evaluating the quality, both issues, the activity and the tool, have to be taken into consideration at the same time.

The quality criterion can help in answering three questions at the same time:

8.2 How to use criteria and indicators?

The criteria can be used in different phases of the ODL process. This means that the criteria and indicators function as a checklist in the design of the learning event, as well as an evaluation tool for analyzing the quality of the learning event afterwards. The third dimension is to analyze the outcome from the latter evaluation in order to

assess the importance of different criteria and to generate the best practices and action steps that will arise from the experience of the actors.

The three steps in utilizing the criteria are: (Diagram 2.)

1. *Before the learning event*: Criteria as a checklist

3. *After evaluation*: Criteria as a tool for transferring the experiences and insight gained from the evaluation to the best practices and action plan.

Case 1 describes the whole quality process by using the same criteria on three occasions for the same learning event.

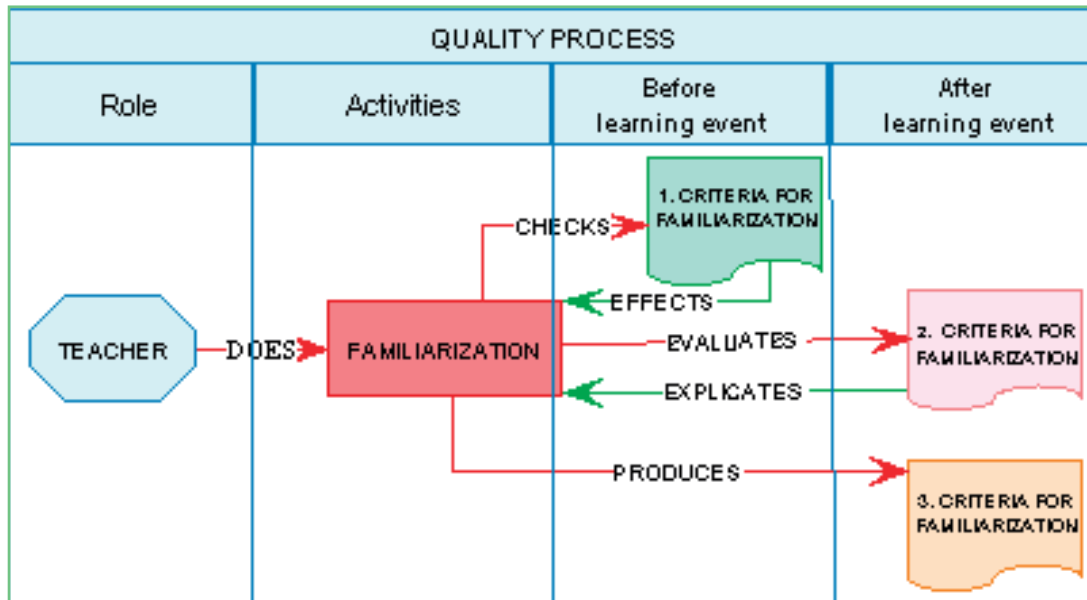


Diagram 2. Example of using the criteria with activities of familiarization

indicating the quality of the planning and the matters to be taken into account.

2. *After the learning event*: Criteria as an evaluation tool indicating the quality of the learning event.

The quality criteria can be used according to one's own needs. They can even be used to evaluate just one role and its criteria. The aim is to increase the understanding of the matters related to an

Case 1:

"John is a lecturer in the faculty of education. There is a new course coming up in a following month. Because his previous experience with e-Learning, John has assigned to be responsible of solving of the technical problems that may appear during the course. He studies the list of activities he is supposed to take care of, and understands that when doing these activities, he is in a role of the technical support. Before learning event, John and the other actors involved with the course have planned and agreed on how the possible technical problems are handled and solved. In the planning phase, before the actual learning events starts, John uses criteria 1. As a checklist to make sure that all the aspects are taken into account. By checking the criteria related to his activities John can still make necessary corrections to the plan.

The learning event starts and the plan is implemented. John is taking care of the upcoming technical problems as planned.

After the learning event John evaluates the success of his activities by using criteria 2. (the same criteria with different scale). He uses the feedback he has received from the students and his own perception. The using of the criteria helps him to understand what was successfully done, and which part must be done differently next time. By understanding gained from this evaluation, John writes down the best practices and action plan. These descriptions he can use when planning the following courses, he can share them among colleagues or use as a basis for the quality assurance of the whole course. "

individual course and to identify the further actions needed to improve quality. The criteria indicate the related activities. Subheadings between the criteria coincide with the activities presented earlier.

The criteria have also been divided under roles, so that it is easy to see the role responsible for a particular activity. Every criterion consists of indicators which specify the criterion. In other words, from every criterion explicating indicators can be identified.

8.2.1 Criteria 1: Before the learning event

Tool for evaluating the plan of the learning event

Before the learning event takes place the criteria can be used as a checklist to make sure that all the matters of quality ODL are taken into account in planning. The criteria help the actors to deepen planning by pointing out related matters.

The criteria can be studied throughout planning, but are especially useful when the planning phase is nearly finished. The criteria can be used to test the final plan, and can spur the actors to analyze planning thoroughly. (*Annex 2.*)

Steps to take: (Example 2, 3)

1. Every criterion consists of indicators which specify the criterion. Mark after each indicator whether or not it has been taken into account in planning. Some of the indicators can be evaluated only after the learning event, but even then it is good to take them into consideration in this planning phase as well.

Scale:

Yes = Has been taken into account.

No = Has not been taken into account.

2. After going through all the indicators you should have a better understanding of the quality of your plan. Describe after each criterion how it is to be fulfilled and performed in the learning event and what tools are to be used.

EXAMPLE 2

Sub process: Student support

Role: Teacher

Activity: Pedagogical planning

Criterion: The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course

Indicators	Yes	No
The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course		
The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students		
The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students		
The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.)		
Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling		
The students receive information about the structure of the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

EXAMPLE 3

Sub process: Learning material design and production

Role: Learning material designer

Activity: The planning of learning material structure

Criterion: The structure of learning material matches the learning objectives

Indicators	Yes	No
The learning material is structured according to the goals set		
The learning material is uniformly structured on the basis of cohesion		
The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes		
The learner can choose his/her own learning path when studying the content		
The evaluations and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

8.2.2 Criteria 2: After the learning event

Tool for evaluating the quality of the learning event.

Evaluation helps to better understand the quality of the whole process of ODL. By evaluating the learning event first through indicators the actors gain better insight into the criterion. After assessing how well the situation described in the indicators corresponds to the situation in a specific course, an estimate can be made of how the whole criterion is fulfilled. (*Annex 3*)

Steps to take: (*Example 4, 5*) .

1. Compare each indicator to the situation in your course. Mark after each indicator whether it corresponds to your case.

Scale for evaluating the indicators:

No = Sentence does not correspond to the situation in my course.

X = Sentence corresponds to the situation in my course to some extent, but improvement is needed.

Yes = Sentence corresponds to the situation in my course.

2. After going through all the indicators of a specific criterion, examine the results and give an overall estimation of how this criterion is fulfilled in your course. The criteria cannot be graded directly on the basis of the grades of their indicators, because the weight of the indicators varies. This means that the actor evaluating the criterion decides on the weight of the indicators and how they affect the total grading of the criterion.

Scale for evaluating the criteria

1 = the issue is not dealt with.

2 = the issue is dealt with to some extent.

3 = the issue is dealt with to a satisfactory extent.

4 = the issue is dealt with well.

5 = the issue is dealt with in an excellent manner.

EXAMPLE 4

Sub process: Student support

Role: Teacher

Activity: Pedagogical planning

Criterion: The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course

Indicators	Yes	X	No
The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course			
The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students			
The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students			
The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.)			
Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling			
The students receive information about the structure of the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

EXAMPLE 5

Sub process: Learning material design and production

Role: Learning material designer

Activity: The planning of learning material structure

Criterion: The structure of learning material matches the learning objectives

Indicators	Yes	X	No
The learning material is structures according to the goals set			
The learning material is uniformly structures on the basis of cohesion			
The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes			
The learner can choose his/her own learning path when studying the content			
The evaluations and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

8.2.3 Criteria 3: After the evaluation

A tool for transferring one's experiences to best practices and action plan.

The third step in using quality criteria is closely connected to the previous step, and these are usually performed at the same time. This step can be understood as an analyzing phase of step 2. This means that results from the evaluation are analyzed and examined to discover the best practices that are closely connected to the actor's own context and therefore useful in other similar situations.

Evaluation has no significant effect in the long run if the results are not properly analyzed and the

activities, or approaches that lead to achieving the objectives and goals. The best practice can be found through research, experience or evaluation.

The term best practice is an established term, used in various situations, even sometimes in circumstances where one cannot be sure that there is no better practice to be found. "Good practice" and "lesson learned" are the terms used, alongside best practice, to indicate the best practice especially in certain situation.

The best practice is a guideline or a good practice to follow, but it is not optimised for all situations. The best practice is usually generated through experience, and therefore the context of that experience should be taken into account. (*Annex 3.*)

EXAMPLE 6

Sub process: Student support

Role: Teacher

Activity: Pedagogical planning

Criterion: The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course

Indicators	Yes	X	No
The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course	X		
The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students		X	
The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students			X
The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.)	X		
Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling			X
The students receive information about the structure of the course	X		

Overall estimation (1-5) ____3____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse in what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in the future (action plan)

valuable experiences are not transferred to guidelines for future learning events.

Quality criteria are tools for making the best practices explicit. A best practice is a technique or procedure that has proven to be the best path to a desired result or the best way to accomplish the objective with quality. Best practices can be strategies,

Steps to take: (*Example 6, 7*)

1. After evaluation go through the estimations of every criterion. Write down your conception of what aspects of the criterion are in order and what aspects need to be improved. Go through every criterion and its indicators in the same way.

EXAMPLE 7

Sub process: Learning material design and production

Role: Learning material designer

Activity: The planning of learning material structure

Criterion: The structure of learning material matches the learning objectives

Indicators	Yes	X	No
The learning material is structured according to the goals set	X		
The learning material is uniformly structured on the basis of cohesion			X
The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes	X		
The learner can choose his/her own learning path when studying the content	X		
The evaluations and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material		X	

Overall estimation (1-5) 4

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse in what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in the future (action plan)

-

8.3 The limits of the quality criteria

When dealing with processes like student support and learning material design and production in ODL, the criteria do not reveal the quality of activities or the use of tools in a comprehensive manner. This stems from the fact that the processes cannot be described with the same exactness as e.g., industrial processes. The processes of ODL grow from the tradition and practice of teaching and learning. There are also a number of feeding processes with specific institutional, cultural, and even personal characteristics which affect these processes.

Secondly, there is no clear-cut end product, which can be put into a test bed and through a series of tests to determine its quality. This is so because the evaluation is directed toward generating a learning event, course or learning object with the help of information technology. The makeup of the learning event is affected by a number of factors

e.g., level of education, nature of the subject matter, size of the learner group, adopted pedagogical approach, learning objectives and so on, which cannot be managed with the use of quality criterion. Moreover, many exogenous circumstances like the starting level of the students, the available technical infrastructure etc. have an influence on the success in carrying out the learning event and for everyone involved if these factors and circumstances turn out to be a blocking factor for high quality learning. If this is the case, the quality criteria help to identify and make these learning obstacles visible, but the sole use of criteria does not eliminate them.

It should also be noted that the end product here is not the learning results of the students. Of course the learning results correspond to the quality of the learning event, but it would be audacious to draw direct conclusions about the quality of learning events on this basis. Results are not a good indicator because e.g., the motivation and commitment of students varies and different situational aspects cause differences in results. Also different scales and measurements of the results can give different scores for the learning results at different times.

To sum up, obviously the ultimate objective of quality criteria is learning with good quality, but the sole use of indicators does not function as an overall and immutable blueprint for high quality learning. To produce good quality learning requires good conditions throughout the planning and organisation of education,, quality assessment and assurance being just a part of it.

The reservations expressed above help to situate the issue area of quality in the utilisation of criteria and their indicators in the broader context of the development of higher education and information technology. For the development of criteria this means that:

- the different sets of criteria should be under constant redesign in response to the demands caused by changes in institutional and organisational factors in the development of higher education, including the different blocking factors
- the development of information technology as it introduces new tools for education should be reflected in the constant redesign of the criteria

To sum up, quality criteria are needed

- to establish quality requirements for higher education personnel in the planning and production of ODL,
- as tools for the self-assessment of one's own activities when examining the need to improve one's performance, and to develop the best practises in one's work,
- as a comparison when looking for the best practices and examples for the improvement of ODL,
- as a quality guarantee or recommendation for the students, other users and producers of ODL.

Annexes

It must be noted that the project concentrated on two sub-processes, student support and learning material design and production. Annexes functions as illustrations, how to identify roles, activities and tools and how to construct quality indicators and their criteria for different activities in different phases of learning. This is emphasized by the adopted approach, which underlines the modification of different roles, activities and tools in the context on constant technological change. So, the lists of roles, activities, tools, criteria and indicators should not be read or used as all-embracing plan but as examples of, how to analyse and construct roles, activities and tools to be used for high quality education in ODL. The annexes are not a part of a blueprint but a part of a guide.

Annex 1: From roles and activities to criteria and indicators.

Referred to page 39

Tables in Annex 1 connect two parts of the guide, *Part 2: Making quality visible* and *Part 3: Generating quality by using quality tools*. Tables list roles and activities of two sub-processes presented in detail in chapters 7.2 - 7.5. In addition tables portray the construction of quality tools, criteria and indicators. Annex 1 is thus a summary of the guide's core content.

Each row of the table presents one activity of the specific role. Activities are responsibilities of that role, and describe WHAT to do. Connected to the activities are the criteria and indicators. They indicate HOW to best perform this activity in order to create a learning event with good quality.

Annex 2: Criteria 1: Before learning event.

Referred to page 44

The use of tables in Annex 2 is described in detail in chapters 8.2 and 8.2.1. Criteria can be used in different phases of the ODL process. In the first phase, criteria can be used before learning event to make sure that all the matters are taken into account. With the help of Annex 2, a user can mark after each indicator whether it has been taken into account or not in the planning of learning event. After each criterion the user should describe more thoroughly the actions and plans related to this criterion. The criteria as a whole are presented in Annex 2 and two examples of them (2 and 3) on pages 44 and 45.

Annex 3: Criteria 2: After the learning event and in evaluation.

Referred to pages 45 and 47

The use of this table is described in detail in chapters 8.2.2 and 8.2.3. As with Annex 2 a user can use the table in his/her work, but this table, with different scale, is used after learning event. Table in Annex 3 describes how to use the criteria to estimate the success of each aspect of the learning event. Evaluation is done by going through each indicator. With overall estimation of the criteria, the success of the whole learning event is realised.

Annex 3 includes criteria 3, the formulation of best practices and action plans based on the evaluation done in previous phase. These two phases are attached to same Annex 3 because usually they are reviewed at the same time.

Annex 4: Quality Process Charts

Referred to page 41

Charts in Annex 4 are the visual presentations of the text in chapter 8.1.1. Each chart describes quality process of one role. Chart indicates activities of the role and how criteria can be used to plan and evaluate that activity.

Slides:

The PowerPoint slides used in training sessions are included at the end of the guide. These slides highlight the essential concepts presented in the guide. Slides are included to help professionals who are planning some training sessions based on this guide.

Annex 1.

Student support: From roles and activities to criteria and indicators

Roles and activities	Criteria and their indicators
Teacher	
Pedagogical planning - To create a schedule - To define the rules of the work - To implement the rules of the work - To create and answer from the pedagogy of the learning event - To choose suitable pedagogical methods - To create activities and assignments	The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course - The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course - The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students - The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students - The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.) - Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling - The students receive information about the structure of the course Rules for the course are created and explicit - Rules are created for the interaction of different actors in the course - The rules are created for the performance of the different actors - The students are informed about their own responsibilities and the required performances in the course - The students are informed about the deadlines of the course - The consequences of missing the deadlines are clearly stated - The students have a possibility to negotiate or participate in the creation of the rules Pedagogical choices are justifiable - Varying pedagogical methods are used to activate the students - The pedagogical methods promote the interaction and collaboration of the students - The methods are suitable for the group size - The pedagogical methods support the objectives of the course - The pedagogical methods support the students' learning - The flexibility of the learning path is assured in the course
Familiarization - To provide information about the course - To explain the learning methodology and methods - To familiarize students with the virtual learning environment (VLE) - To explain the singularities and special characteristics of ODL	The students receive information about the course - The students receive information concerning the student support - The students receive information about the duties and responsibilities of the teaching staff and the different actors in the course - The students are provided with the actors' contact information - The objectives of the course are presented to the students before the course - The students receive information about the evaluation and grading of the course The students are familiarized with the technical learning environment and ODL - The students receive information about the chosen learning environment - The students can practice the use of the learning environment prior to the beginning of the course - The student receive guidance related to the learning environment - The students are familiarized with e-Learning - The students are informed about the special characteristics of e-Learning

Guidance in subject matters • To teach the subject • To answer subject related questions • To motivate the learner in the accomplishment of the subject objectives	Guidance in subject matters is available for students • The teaching of the subject is provided for the students • The students' level of knowledge is taken into account in teaching • Suitable pedagogical methods are used to teach the subject • Questions concerning the subject are welcomed and answered • The questions are answered in a predefined time • The students have access to sufficient resources supporting the learning of the subject. (Library, additional materials, databases, etc.) • Guidance is offered on how to use the complementary materials • The students are encouraged to give feedback concerning the teaching of the subject
Leading the learning process • To help students to elaborate personalised learning plans • To lead the learning dynamics • To reach learning assignments with the students • To activate and promote the participation of students	The guidance is in balance with the students' progress and needs • The students' progress in course is observed • Changes can be made to the course structure according to the students' performance and progress • The students' progress in course affects the volume of the guidance • The students are contacted in case of falling behind • Steps are taken to retain the students in the course • The students are helped to create personalised learning plans The learning of the subject is supported by activities • The number of activities is sufficient to support learning • The activities encourage critical thinking and problem-solving • The activities can be performed with the resources and time available • The possibilities of different tools are taken into account when designing the learning activities • The activities emphasize the students' responsibility in the learning process • The activities connect with the students' prior experiences in the learning of the subject
Feedback and evaluation • To use instruments for continuous assessment • To give feedback from the assessment as soon as possible • To assure the final evaluation	The students receive feedback • Regular feedback is given to the students • The feedback is given during and after the course • The feedback is justifiable • The student may hear the justifications for the feedback, if desired • The students have a possibility to respond to the feedback • The feedback is the kind of constructive feedback which aims for the progression of the students • Suitable methods for the feedback are used (Private / group feedback) • The students are treated as individuals when given the feedback The students are encouraged to give feedback • The students are encouraged to give feedback for the staff • The students' participation in the course development is emphasized • The feedback is analysed • The students are encouraged to give feedback to other students
Tutor	
Motivation • To motivate the students in learning • To promote an atmosphere that supports learning and participation • To make the students feel part of the educational community	The students' motivation is promoted • A positive and approving atmosphere is created • The students have possibility to express their opinions and wishes concerning the course • The characteristics of a specific group of students are analysed and taken into account when offering support • Alternative learning paths are introduced to the students • There are activating elements in the course (assignments, discussions etc.) • The students' responsibility is emphasized • The concept of the students as members of the academic community is promoted

Guidance - To offer guidance if needed - To answer questions about the course or to transfer the addressed questions to the right person (i.e. questions about administrative issues)	The students' receive guidance and support - The tutor's participation and interference is in balance with the students' needs - Problems and conflicts are identified quickly and addressed - The students' participation is observed - The students' questions are answered without a delay - Wrongly addressed questions are delivered to the right person (i.e. question concerning (technology, administration))
Encouragement to interaction and to collaborative work - To promote interaction and cooperative work among the learners - To manage problems or conflicts - To promote functional interaction between the students and the staff	Interaction is successfully organised - A tolerable and supporting atmosphere for the interaction is created - The rules of the interaction are announced beforehand - The time scale for the interaction is announced beforehand - Expressing arguments and opinions in discussions is encouraged - The teaching staff is the initiator of the interaction - Necessary information about the student performance is shared between the teaching staff - The student interaction with the faculty is facilitated through a variety of ways Modes of interaction are suitable - Interaction modes are suitable for the purpose - The diversity of preferences is taken into account by providing alternative communication channels - The capacities of the different interaction tools are taken into account - The different purposes for the interaction are taken into account (information, socialization, learning etc.) - The students have alternative ways and tools to contact the teaching staff - Learning activities are used to promote interactivity Collaborative work is supported - Team player skills are expected from the actors - The forming of the group is supported - Shared expertise between the group members is expected - The group work is observed - The group is working in a democratic manner - The group work is intervened in case of a conflict or a problem - Group work tools of the learning environment are used - There is a balance between the individual work and group work - The students are supported to take on different roles in the group - Expectations are specified for participation in collaborative learning activities
Coordinator	
Advise - To give general advice on the methodology on following ODL - To give general information on the institution - To offer guidance and support to other actors in the course	The students receive support related to the degree and studies in general - The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the degree structure - The students questions concerning the diploma and degree are answered within a predefined time limit - The students receive information about the institution
Coordination - To coordinate the different aspects of the course - To integrate pedagogical issues with technical aspects - To control the training material delivery - To supervise the work of the staff - To manage conflicts between the students and tutors or teachers	The coordination of the course is efficiently organized - Different aspects are integrated to create the course - There is a person in charge of the coordination - The responsibility on the course is predefined - The students are informed about the coordination in the course The work of the different actors in the course is coordinated - Staff is chosen according to the requirements of the course - The actions of the different actors are in line with each others - The methodological guidelines of the course are defined - Conflicts and problems between the students and staff are managed

Connections - To manage connections with actors inside the institution - To manage connections with actors outside the institution - To assess the impact of the training	Connections outside the course are managed - Relations to the actors inside the institution are managed - Recourses available are taken advantage of - The relations to actors outside the institution are managed - The impact of the training and the course is evaluated from the students' point of view - The impact of the course is evaluated from the institution's point of view
Administrative support	
Registration - To provide relevant information on ODL specificities to potential students before the registration to a course - To manage the registration	The students receive support during the registration process - The students are provided with relevant information about the course - The registration is managed efficiently - The registration is handled with confidence
Records - To update the academic file of each student - To manage the students' records and grades - To file the students' records appropriately	The students' records are managed properly - The students' records and grades are saved and filed - The students' records are handled with confidence - The students' academic files are updated after the course - The student records and data are stored for a predefined time - The students have a possibility to see their records and data - The student records are delivered to necessary databases after the course
Administrative tasks - To connect the specific course with the institution's strategy - To connect the specific course with the institution's systems - Practical arrangements	Institution academic norms are in sync with the course - The course is in balance with the institution strategy - The course is in balance with the discipline's objectives
Technical support	
The designing of the technical infrastructure To organise the VLE and other technological tools	Suitable technical tools are used to support learning - Technical tools are chosen according to the objectives of the course - The technical tools are chosen considering the needs of the students - The chosen tools are reachable for every student - Alternative learning paths and medias are introduced - Possible technical problems are identified before the course
Personal technical support - To answer questions about the virtual learning environment - To create and maintain a FAQ or otherwise make regular review on the problems encountered by the users and on possible solutions - To prevent typical students' problems - To provide information	Technical support is available - The students receive information about the technical support available - The students are encouraged to use the technical assistance and support - Help is available for all the hardware necessary - Help is available for all the software necessary - The students' activities are observed and needed support is identified - The teaching staff and other actors are informed about the occurring technical problems - The students have alternative ways to contact tutor/tutors The students are provided with information of the used technology. - The students receive information about the required hardware and software before the course. - The students receive detailed information of the electronic media used. - The students receive information about the required technical competence.
The solving of the technical problems - To attend and solve the problems of the network, server and connections - To solve hardware problems - To solve software problems - To attend technical problems within the VLE	Personal support with the used technology is available for the students - A help desk is available for the students - The help desk is reachable through different ways (phone, internet, face-to-face). - The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the used technology. - The technical problems are addressed quickly to prevent frustration. - Tolerance to the users' mistakes is expected from the technical support.

Access control - To guarantee the protection of privacy and intellectual property - To give access keys to the VLE - To give access keys to the library and other additional materials - To manage access - To stop non-registered users from accessing to the students' productions in collaborative spaces	Students are provided with access to the chosen technical solutions - The protection of privacy and intellectual property is provided. - Access to learning environment is ensured - Access to additional materials and resources are provided.
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Learning material design and production: From roles and activities to criteria and indicators

Roles and activities	Criteria and their indicators
Learning material designer	
Information retrieval	Learning materials are appropriate and up-to-date. - Searches for learning materials in the internet are in use. - Searches for learning materials from the databases of academic publishing are in use. - Web-based dictionaries, encyclopaedias and e-books are in use. - The digitalisation of the needed learning materials is taken care of. Learning material has an easy access - Learning material can be used without time restrictions. - Learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards. - Learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students.
Planning of resources for learning	Learning material is available on required languages - Learning material is available in the languages required by the users. - Language options are easily accessible from different parts of the material. - Language options refer to different languages not to different countries.
Planning of learning material structure	The structure of the learning material matches the learning objectives - The learning material is structured according to the goals set. - The learning material is uniformly structured on the basis of cohesion. - The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes. - The learner can choose his/her own learning path, when studying the content - The assignments and exercises have their due place in the structure of the material. - The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material.
Planning of pedagogical approach used	The learning material is in accordance with the chosen pedagogical approach. - The learning material is in accordance with the needs and the approaches of the learners. - The tools and activities used buttress the pedagogical approach - The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the learning material.

Planning of tools, saving methods and delivery for the material	The proper and available tools are in use - The hardware is accessible, efficient and easy to use. - The software needed for utilisation for the learning material is available and easy to use. - The tool is compatible with other tools and software. - The tool fits the material, its structure and content. - The saving methods are secure and extensive. - The usage of tool enables the achievement of the objectives of learning materials.
Taking care of proprietary issues	The learning material is expediently designed - Learning material is designed for recurrent usage. - Learning material is designed for multiple usages so that access privileges, right to use or copyright allow the multiple usage of material. - The resources and the maintenance of the learning material are expressed. - The legal restraints for the maintenance and further development of the learning material are expressed. - The user administration of the learning material is organised. - Learning material is designed for storage in a repository accessible to all potential users.
Learning material producer	
Defining of expenses for production and users	The cost of the production of learning material is reasonable. - The cost in money, manpower and other resources for the production are estimated. - The costs for administration, maintenance and further development of the learning material are estimated. - The total benefit of the learning material for the operational environment of the institution is evaluated. The cost of the usage of learning material is reasonable. - The pricing of chargeable learning material is explained to the learner. - The price of the chargeable learning material is justified in relation to its production.
Setting of goals for learning	The content of the learning material is comprehensive - The learners have been informed about the learning objectives. - Required level of knowledge for the learning of material is stated out. - Learning material covers the subject matter to be learned. - Learning material is tagged to other information sources dealing with the same and related subject matters. - Mode of deepening the knowledge is illustrated
Creation of contents according to the goals set	The content of the learning material is understandable - Means of expression in the learning material comply with the accepted principles of production (e.g. principles of web writing). - Terminology used in the learning material is known to the learners. - Learning material is logically organised. The content of the learning material is reliable - The content of the material is accurate (and authentic). - The content of the material is up to date. - The last update is announced. - The authentic content is separated from other contents delivered with the learning material (e.g. bulletin boards, discussion forums, causeries, opinions, fiction, manipulated pictures, etc.). - The information sources of the content are expressed clearly. - Liability concerning the content is stated out.

Modification and reuse of existing materials	The needs of the user groups and users concerning the learning material has been taken into account - Feedback mechanisms are established. - Different use cases and operating situation of the learning material are analysed. - Recurrence and duration of the usage of learning material is taken into account. - The personification of the learning material is implemented with care.
Determination of additional materials	The learners distinguish the different types of materials - The learners can identify the core and the additional materials. - The minimum and maximum requirements concerning the learning are spelled out. - The learners may choose the level between minimum and maximum levels he/she aims at.
Audio-visual planner	
Planning and producing the audiovisual layout of the material	The interface of the learning material is clear - Design (colours, font types and sizes and functional elements) is practical - Design is consistent supporting navigability. - Functional elements (frames, linking elements, pop-ups, push-buttons, radio-buttons etc.) support the progression in the learning material. - The vocabulary is coherent and consistent supporting navigability and the progression in the learning material.
Planning and producing the navigation in the material with the help of different elements	The linking elements in the learning material are clear - Linking elements (texts, push-buttons, and picture metaphors) describe clearly the path to the tagged object (web site, web page, tool, etc.). - The keywords in name of the linking element and in the title of the tagged object are consistent. - The linked objects are functional and up-to-date. - All the users can progress using the linking elements (disabilities are taken into account). - The usage of a linking element is shown by visual means.
Inclusion of different media elements, e.g. picture, icons, graphic, voice, video, animation	Audiovisual design of the learning material is functional - The learning material presented with different media (text, picture, graphics, animation, video, audio) promote the learning process. - Different media elements are of good quality. - Different media elements are compatible in usage. - Media elements are delivered in common file formats. - Users can administer the uploading of large media elements. - Means of expression are appropriate (e.g. no flashing texts or pictures used).
Usability planner	
Mapping of skills and needs of learners for the development of user interface.	The learning material has an easy access. - The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined. - The learning material can be used without time restrictions. - The learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards. - The learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students. - The user interface of the material is logically consistent - The user interface has all the functionalities that the learner needs

Planning of navigation and acting in the learning material	The navigation and acting is easy to use - The navigation routes are clearly marked - The navigation is logically constructed - The communication, interaction and feedback channels can easily be found - The assignment, exercise and exam tools are at their proper places
Planning of secure delivery and saving methods for the learning material	Learning material is expediently delivered - Data security is taken into account in accordance with the existing rules. - Confidentiality of the information used in the learning material is evaluated. - User authentication is on a proper level. - Authenticity and integrity of the saved information is secured. - Public information on users is in accordance with the privacy rights.
Usability testing of the learning material	The usability of the learning material is tested - The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined. - Learning material is furnished with proper support and instructions. - Learning materials in different formats are compatible. - Needed materials and information sources are available. - Communication, interaction and feedback channels are tested. - Learning material can be accessed and used in different ICT environments. - User privileges don't block out the potential users.

Annex 2:

Criteria 1: Before learning event

Before learning event takes place the criteria can be used as a checklist to make sure that all the matters of quality ODL are taken into account in planning. Criteria help actors to deepen the planning by pointing out the related matters. Criteria can be studied throughout the planning, but it is especially useful when planning phase is nearly finished. Criteria can be used to test the final plan, and it can spur the actors to analyze the planning thoroughly.

Steps:

1. Every criterion consists of indicators, which specifies the criterion. Mark after each indicator if it has been taken into account in planning or not. Some of the indicators can be evaluated only after the learning event, but even then it is good to take them into consideration in planning phase also.
2. After gone through all the indicators you should have better understanding of the quality of your plan. Describe after each criterion what way it is going to be realised and performed in the learning event and what tools are going to be used.

Scale:

- No** = Has been taken into account
Yes = Has not been taken into account

Student support

Role: Teacher

Activities: *Pedagogical planning*

Criterion: The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course

Indicators	Yes	No
The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course		
The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students		
The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students		
The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.)		
Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling		
The students receive information about the structure of the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Rules for the course are created and explicated

Indicators:	Yes	No
Rules are created for the interaction of different actors in the course		
The rules are created for the performance of the different actors		

The students are informed about their own responsibilities and the required performances in the course		
The students are informed about the deadlines of the course		
The consequences of missing the deadlines are clearly stated		
The students have a possibility to negotiate or participate in the creation of the rules		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Pedagogical choices are justifiable

Indicators:	Yes	No
Varying pedagogical methods are used to activate the students		
The pedagogical methods promote the interaction and collaboration of the students		
The methods are suitable for the group size		
The pedagogical methods support the objectives of the course		
The pedagogical methods support the students' learning		
The flexibility of the learning path is assured in the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Familiarization

Criterion: The students receive information about the course

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students receive information concerning the student support		
The students receive information about the duties and responsibilities of the teaching staff and the different actors in the course		
The students are provided with the actors' contact information		
The objectives of the course are presented to the students before the course		
The students receive information about the evaluation and grading of the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The students are familiarized with the technical learning environment and ODL

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students receive information about the chosen learning environment		
The students can practice the use of the learning environment prior to the beginning of the course		
The student receive guidance related to the learning environment		
The students are familiarized with e-Learning		
The students are informed about the special characteristics of e-Learning		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Guidance in subject matters

Criterion: Guidance in subject matters is available for students

Indicators:	Yes	No
The teaching of the subject is provided for the students		
The students' level of knowledge is taken into account in teaching		
Suitable pedagogical methods are used to teach the subject		
Questions concerning the subject are welcomed and answered		
The questions are answered in a predefined time		
The students have access to sufficient recourses supporting the learning of the subject. (Library, additional materials, databases, etc.)		
Guidance is offered on how to use the complementary materials		
The students are encouraged to give feedback concerning the teaching of the subject		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Leading the learning process

Criterion: The guidance is in balance with the students' progress and needs

Indicators	Yes	No
The students' progress in course is observed		

Changes can be made to the course structure according to the students' performance and progress		
The students' progress in course affects the volume of the guidance		
The students are contacted in case of falling behind		
Steps are taken to retain the students in the course		
The students are helped to create personalised learning plans		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The learning of the subject is supported by activities

Indicators:	Yes	No
The number of activities is sufficient to support learning		
The activities encourage critical thinking and problem-solving		
The activities can be performed with the resources and time available		
The possibilities of different tools are taken into account when designing the learning activities		
The activities emphasize the students' responsibility in the learning process		
The activities connect with the students' prior experiences in the learning of the subject		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Feedback and evaluation

Criterion: The students receive feedback

Indicators:	Yes	No
Regular feedback is given to the students		
The feedback is given during and after the course		
The feedback is justifiable		
The student may hear the justifications for the feedback, if desired		
The students have a possibility to respond to the feedback		
The feedback is the kind of constructive feedback which aims for the progression of the students		

Suitable methods for the feedback are used (Private / group feedback)		
The students are treated as individuals when given the feedback		

Describe what in way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The students are encouraged to give feedback

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students are encouraged to give feedback for the staff		
The students' participation in the course development is emphasized		
The feedback is analysed		
The students are encouraged to give feedback to other students		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The students' activity is evaluated

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students' are evaluated in a personalized way		
Suitable evaluation methods are used (private / public)		
The students have a possibility to participate in the evaluation		
The students are asked to perform self-assessment		
Peer evaluation is encouraged		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

The course is developed according to the evaluation

Indicators:	Yes	No
The success of the course is analyzed		
The course is developed according to the experiences		
The feedback of the students is analyzed to develop the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Tutor*Activities: Motivation*

Criterion: The students' motivation is promoted

Indicators:	Yes	No
A positive and approving atmosphere is created		
The students have possibility to express their opinions and wishes concerning the course		
The characteristics of a specific group of students are analysed and taken into account when offering support		
Alternative learning paths are introduced to the students		
There are activating elements in the course (assignments, discussions etc.)		
The students' responsibility is emphasized		
The concept of the students as members of the academic community is promoted		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Guidance

Criterion: The students' receive guidance and support

Indicators:	Yes	No
The tutor's participation and interference is in balance with the students' needs		
Problems and conflicts are identified quickly and addressed		
The students' participation is observed		
The students' questions are answered without a delay		
Wrongly addressed questions are delivered to the right person (i.e. question concerning (technology, administration)		

Describe what in way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Encouragement to interaction and to collaborative work

Criterion: Interaction is successfully organised

Indicators:	Yes	No

A tolerable and supporting atmosphere for the interaction is created		
The rules of the interaction are announced beforehand		
The time scale for the interaction is announced beforehand		
Expressing arguments and opinions in discussions is encouraged		
The teaching staff is the initiator of the interaction		
Necessary information about the student performance is shared between the teaching staff		
The student interaction with the faculty is facilitated through a variety of ways		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Modes of interaction are suitable

Indicators:	Yes	No
Interaction modes are suitable for the purpose		
The diversity of preferences is taken into account by providing alternative communication channels		
The capacities of the different interaction tools are taken into account		
The different purposes for the interaction are taken into account (information, socialization, learning etc.)		
The students have alternative ways and tools to contact the teaching staff		
Learning activities are used to promote interactivity		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Collaborative work is supported

Indicators:	Yes	No
Team player skills are expected from the actors		
The forming of the group is supported		
Shared expertise between the group members is expected		
The group work is observed		
The group is working in a democratic manner		

The group work is intervened in case of a conflict or a problem		
Group work tools of the learning environment are used		
There is a balance between the individual work and group work		
The students are supported to take on different roles in the group		
Expectations are specified for participation in collaborative learning activities		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Coordinator

Activities: Advise

Criterion: The students receive support related to the degree and studies in general

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the degree structure		
The students questions concerning the diploma and degree are answered within a predefined time limit		
The students receive information about the institution		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Coordination

Criterion: The coordination of the course is efficiently organized

Indicators:	Yes	No
Different aspects are integrated to create the course		
There is a person in charge of the coordination		
The responsibility on the course is predefined		
The students are informed about the coordination in the course		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The work of the different actors in the course is coordinated

Indicators:	Yes	No
Staff is chosen according to the requirements of the course		
The actions of the different actors are in line with each others		
The methodological guidelines of the course are defined		

Conflicts and problems between the students and staff are managed		
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Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Connections

Criterion: Connections outside the course are managed

Indicators:	Yes	No
Relations to the actors inside the institution are managed		
Recourses available are taken advantage of		
The relations to actors outside the institution are managed		
The impact of the training and the course is evaluated from the students' point of view		
The impact of the course is evaluated from the institution's point of view		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Administrative support

Activities: Registration

Criterion: The students receive support during the registration process

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students are provided with relevant information about the course		
The registration is managed efficiently		
The registration is handled with confidence		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Records

Criterion: The students' records are managed properly

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students' records and grades are saved and filed		
The students' records are handled with confidence		
The students' academic files are updated after the course		
The student records and data are stored for a predefined time		

The students have a possibility to see their records and data		
The student records are delivered to necessary databases after the course		

Describe what in way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Administrative tasks

Criterion: Institution academic norms are in sync with the course

Indicators:	Yes	No
The course is in balance with the institution strategy		
The course is in balance with the discipline's objectives		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Technical support

Activity: Designing the technical infrastructure

Criterion: Suitable technical tools are used to support learning

Indicators:	Yes	No
Technical tools are chosen according to the objectives of the course		
The technical tools are chosen considering the needs of the students		
The chosen tools are reachable for every student		
Alternative learning paths and medias are introduced		
Possible technical problems are identified before the course		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Personal technical support

Criterion: Technical support is available

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students receive information about the technical support available		
The students are encouraged to use the technical assistance and support		
Help is available for all the hardware necessary		

Help is available for all the software necessary		
The students' activities are observed and needed support is identified		
The teaching staff and other actors are informed about the occurring technical problems		
The students have alternative ways to contact tutor/tutors		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The students are provided with information of the used technology

Indicators:	Yes	No
The students receive information about the required hardware and software before the course		
The students receive detailed information of the electronic media used		
The students receive information about the required technical competence		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Solving of the technical problems

Criterion: Personal support with the used technology is available for the students

Indicators:	Yes	No
A help desk is available for the students		
The help desk is reachable through different ways (phone, internet, face-to-face)		
The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the used technology		
The technical problems are addressed quickly to prevent frustration		
Tolerance to the users' mistakes is expected from the technical support		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Activities: Access control

Criterion: Students are provided with access to the chosen technical solutions

Indicators:	Yes	No
The protection of privacy and intellectual property is provided		
Access to learning environment is ensured		
Access to additional materials and resources are provided		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Learning material design and production

Role: Learning material designer

Criterion: Learning materials are appropriate and up-to-date.

Indicators	Yes	No
Searches for learning materials in the internet are in use.		
Searches for learning materials from the databases of academic publishing are in use.		
Web-based dictionaries, encyclopaedias and e-books are in use.		
The digitalisation of the needed learning materials is taken care of.		

Describe in what way the criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Learning material has an easy access

Indicators:	Yes	No
Learning material can be used without time restrictions.		
Learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards		
Learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Learning material is available on required languages

Indicators:	Yes	No
Learning material is available in the languages required by the users.		
Language options are easily accessible from different parts of the material.		
Language options refer to different languages not to different countries.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The structure of the learning material matches the learning objectives

Indicators:	Yes	No
The learning material is structured according to the goals set.		
The learning material is uniformly structured on the basis of cohesion.		
The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes.		
The learner can choose his/her own learning path, when studying the content		
The assignments and exercises have their due place in the structure of the material.		
The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The learning material is in accordance with the chosen pedagogical approach.

Indicator:	Yes	No
The learning material is in accordance with the needs and the approaches of the learners.		
The tools and activities used buttress the pedagogical approach.		
The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the learning material.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The proper and available tools are in use

Indicator:	Yes	No
The hardware is accessible, efficient and easy to use.		
The software needed for utilisation for the learning material is available and easy to use.		
The tool is compatible with other tools and software.		
The tool fits the material, its structure and content.		
The saving methods are secure and extensive.		
The usage of tool enables the achievement of the objectives of learning materials.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The learning material is expediently designed

Indicator:	Yes	No
Learning material is designed for recurrent usage.		

Learning material is designed for multiple usages so that access privileges, right to use or copyright allow the multiple usage of material.		
The resources and the maintenance of the learning material are expressed.		
The legal restraints for the maintenance and further development of the learning material are expressed.		
The user administration of the learning material is organised.		
Learning material is designed for storage in a repository accessible to all potential users.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Learning material producer

Criterion: The cost of the production of learning material is reasonable.

Indicator:	Yes	No
The cost in money, manpower and other resources for the production are estimated.		
The costs for administration, maintenance and further development of the learning material are estimated.		
The total benefit of the learning material for the operational environment of the institution is evaluated.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The cost of the usage of learning material is reasonable.

Indicator:	Yes	No
The pricing of chargeable learning material is explained to the learner.		
The price of the chargeable learning material is justified in relation to its production.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The content of the learning material is comprehensive

Indicator:	Yes	No
The learners have been informed about the learning objectives.		
Required level of knowledge for the learning of material is stated out.		
Learning material covers the subject matter to be learned.		
Learning material is tagged to other information sources dealing with the same and related subject matters.		
Mode of deepening the knowledge is illustrated.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The content of the learning material is understandable

Indicator:	Yes	No
Means of expression in the learning material comply with the accepted principles of production (e.g. principles of web writing).		
Terminology used in the learning material is known to the learners.		
Learning material is logically organised.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The content of the learning material is reliable

Indicator:	Yes	No
The content of the material is accurate (and authentic).		
The content of the material is up to date.		
The last update is announced.		
The authentic content is separated from other contents delivered with the learning material (e.g. bulletin boards, discussion forums, causeries, opinions, fiction, manipulated pictures, etc.).		
The information sources of the content are expressed clearly.		
Liability concerning the content is stated out.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The needs of the user groups and users concerning the learning material has been taken into account

Indicator:	Yes	No
Feedback mechanisms are established.		
Different use cases and operating situation of the learning material are analysed.		
Recurrence and duration of the usage of learning material is taken into account..		
The personification of the learning material is implemented with care.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The learners distinguish the different types of materials

Indicator:	Yes	No
The learners can identify the core and the additional materials.		
The minimum and maximum requirements concerning the learning are spelled out.		
The learners may choose the level between minimum and maximum levels he/she aims at.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Audio-visual planner

Criterion: The interface of the learning material is clear

Indicator:	Yes	No
Design (colours, font types and sizes and functional elements) is practical.		
Design is consistent supporting navigability.		
Functional elements (frames, linking elements, pop-ups, push-buttons, radio-buttons etc.) support the progression in the learning material.		
The vocabulary is coherent and consistent supporting navigability and the progression in the learning material.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The linking elements in the learning material are clear

Indicator:	Yes	No
Linking elements (texts, push-buttons, and picture metaphors) describe clearly the path to the tagged object (web site, web page, tool, etc.).		
The keywords in name of the linking element and in the title of the tagged object are consistent.		
The linked objects are functional and up-to-date.		
All the users can progress using the linking elements (disabilities are taken into account).		
The usage of a linking element is shown by visual means.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Audio-visual design of the learning material is functional

Indicator:	Yes	No
The learning material presented with different media (text, picture, graphics, animation, video, audio) promote the learning process.		
Different media elements are of good quality.		
Different media elements are compatible in usage.		
Media elements are delivered in common file formats.		
Users can administer the uploading of large media elements.		
Means of expression are appropriate (e.g. no flashing texts or pictures used).		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Role: Usability planner

Criterion: The learning material has an easy access.

Indicator:	Yes	No
The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined.		
The learning material can be used without time restrictions.		
The learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards.		
The learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students.		
The user interface of the material is logically consistent.		
The user interface has all the functionalities that the learner needs.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The navigation and acting is easy to use

Indicator:	Yes	No
The navigation routes are clearly marked.		
The navigation is logically constructed.		
The communication, interaction and feedback channels can easily be found.		
The assignment, exercise and exam tools are at their proper places.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: Learning material is expediently delivered

Indicator:	Yes	No
Data security is taken into account in accordance with the existing rules.		
Confidentiality of the information used in the learning material is evaluated.		
User authentication is on a proper level.		
Authenticity and integrity of the saved information is secured.		
Public information on users is in accordance with the privacy rights.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

Criterion: The usability of the learning material is tested

Indicator:	Yes	No
The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined.		
Learning material is furnished with proper support and instructions.		

Learning materials in different formats are compatible.		
Needed materials and information sources are available.		
Communication, interaction and feedback channels are tested.		
Learning material can be accessed and used in different ICT environments.		
User privileges don't block out the potential users.		

Describe what way criterion is going to be realised and performed and what tools are going to be used.

ANNEX 3

Criteria 2: After the learning event and evaluation

After learning event:

Evaluation helps to understand better the quality of the whole process of ODL. By evaluating learning event first through indicators actors have better insight on the criterion. After evaluating of how well the situation described in indicators corresponds the situation in specific course, an estimation of how the whole criterion is realised can be formed.

Steps:

1. Compare each indicator to the situation in your course. Mark after each indicator does it corresponds to your case.

Scale for evaluating the indicators:

- No=** Sentence does not correspond to the situation in my course
X= Sentence corresponds to the situation in my course to some extent, but improvement is needed
Yes= Sentence corresponds to the situation in my course

2. After gone through all the indicators of specific criterion, examine the results and give an overall estimation on how this criterion is realised in your course. The criteria cannot be graded directly on the basis of the grades of their indicators, because the weight of the indicators varies. This means that the actor evaluating the criterion decides the weight of the indicators and how they affect the total grading of the criterion.

Scale for evaluating the criteria:

- 1=** the issue is not realised.
2= the issue is realised to some extend.
3= the issue is realised to satisfactory extend.
4= the issue is realised well.
5= the issue is realised in an excellent manner.

After evaluation:

Third step in using quality criteria is closely connected to step 2, and usually they are performed at the same time. This step can be understood as a analyze phase of step 2. This means that results from evaluation are analyzed and examined to discover best practices that are closely connected to actor's own context and therefore useful in other similar situations. Evaluation has no significant effect in the long run, if results are not properly analyzed and valuable experiences are not transferred into guidelines for future learning events.

The quality criteria are tool for making best practices explicit. A best practice is a technique or procedure that has proven to be the best path to a desired result or best way to accomplish the objective with quality. Best practice is a guideline or a good practice to follow, but it is not optimised for all situations. Best practice is usually generated through experience, and therefore context of that experience should be taken into account.

Steps:

1. After evaluation (step 2) go through estimations of every criterion. Write down your conception of what aspects of the criterion are in order and what aspects need to be improved. Go through every criterion and its indicators in the same way.

Scale:

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan) _____

Student support

Role: Teacher

Activities: *Pedagogical planning*

Criterion: The schedule is in balance with the different aspects of the course

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The schedule is in balance with the objectives of the course			
The schedule is in balance with the capacity of the students			
The schedule is in balance with the workload of the students			
The schedule is in balance with the resources (staff, time etc.)			
Special characteristics of the used technology are taken into account in the scheduling			
The students receive information about the structure of the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Rules for the course are created and explicit

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Rules are created for the interaction of different actors in the course			
The rules are created for the performance of the different actors			
The students are informed about their own responsibilities and the required performances in the course			
The students are informed about the deadlines of the course			
The consequences of missing the deadlines are clearly stated			
The students have a possibility to negotiate or participate in the creation of the rules			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Pedagogical choices are justifiable

Indicators	Yes	x	No
Varying pedagogical methods are used to activate the students			
The pedagogical methods promote the interaction and collaboration of the students			
The methods are suitable for the group size			
The pedagogical methods support the objectives of the course			
The pedagogical methods support the students' learning			
The flexibility of the learning path is assured in the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Familiarization

Criterion: The students receive information about the course

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students receive information concerning the student support			
The students receive information about the duties and responsibilities of the teaching staff and the different actors in the course			
The students are provided with the actors' contact information			
The objectives of the course are presented to the students before the course			
The students receive information about the evaluation and grading of the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan) _____

Criterion: The students are familiarized with the technical learning environment and ODL

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students receive information about the chosen learning environment			
The students can practice the use of the learning environment prior to the beginning of the course			
The student receive guidance related to the learning environment			
The students are familiarized with e-Learning			
The students are informed about the special characteristics of e-Learning			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Guidance in subject matters

Criterion: Guidance in subject matters is available for students

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The teaching of the subject is provided for the students			
The students' level of knowledge is taken into account in teaching			
Suitable pedagogical methods are used to teach the subject			
Questions concerning the subject are welcomed and answered			
The questions are answered in a predefined time			
The students have access to sufficient recourses supporting the learning of the subject. (Library, additional materials, databases, etc.)			
Guidance is offered on how to use the complementary materials			
The students are encouraged to give feedback concerning the teaching of the subject			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be

achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Leading the learning process

Criterion: The guidance is in balance with the students' progress and needs

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students' progress in course is observed			
Changes can be made to the course structure according to the students' performance and progress			
The students' progress in course affects the volume of the guidance			
The students are contacted in case of falling behind			
Steps are taken to retain the students in the course			
The students are helped to create personalised learning plans			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: The learning of the subject is supported by activities

	Yes	x	No
The number of activities is sufficient to support learning			
The activities encourage critical thinking and problem-solving			
The activities can be performed with the resources and time available			
The possibilities of different tools are taken into account when designing the learning activities			
The activities emphasize the students' responsibility in the learning process			
The activities connected with the students' prior experiences in the learning of the subject			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Feedback and evaluation

Criterion: The students receive feedback

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Regular feedback is given to the students			
The feedback is given during and after the course			
The feedback is justifiable			
The student may hear the justifications for the feedback, if desired			
The students have a possibility to respond to the feedback			
The feedback is the kind of constructive feedback which aims for the progression of the students			
Suitable methods for the feedback are used (Private / group feedback)			
The students are treated as individuals when given the feedback			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: The students are encouraged to give feedback

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students are encouraged to give feedback for the staff			
The students' participation in the course development is emphasized			
The feedback is analysed			
The students are encouraged to give feedback to other students			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: The students' activity is evaluated

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students' are evaluated in a personalized way			
Suitable evaluation methods are used (private / public)			
The students have a possibility to participate in the evaluation			
The students are asked to perform self-assessment			
Peer evaluation is encouraged			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: The course is developed according to the evaluation

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The success of the course is analyzed			
The course is developed according to the experiences			
The feedback of the students is analyzed to develop the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Role: Tutor

Activities: Motivation

Criterion: The students' motivation is promoted

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
A positive and approving atmosphere is created			
The students have possibility to express their opinions and wishes concerning the course			

The characteristics of a specific group of students are analysed and taken into account when offering support			
Alternative learning paths are introduced to the students			
There are activating elements in the course (assignments, discussions etc.)			
The students' responsibility is emphasized			
The concept of the students as members of the academic community is promoted			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Guidance

Criterion: The students' receive guidance and support

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The tutor's participation and interference is in balance with the students' needs			
Problems and conflicts are identified quickly and addressed			
The students' participation is observed			
The students' questions are answered without a delay			
Wrongly addressed questions are delivered to the right person (i.e. question concerning (technology, administration)			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Encouragement to interaction and to collaborative work

Criterion: Interaction is successfully organised

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
A tolerable and supporting atmosphere for the interaction is created			

The rules of the interaction are announced beforehand			
The time scale for the interaction is announced beforehand			
Expressing arguments and opinions in discussions is encouraged			
The teaching staff is the initiator of the interaction			
Necessary information about the student performance is shared between the teaching staff			
The student interaction with the faculty is facilitated through a variety of ways			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: Modes of interaction are suitable

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Interaction modes are suitable for the purpose			
The diversity of preferences is taken into account by providing alternative communication channels			
The capacities of the different interaction tools are taken into account			
The different purposes for the interaction are taken into account (information, socialization, learning etc.)			
The students have alternative ways and tools to contact the teaching staff			
Learning activities are used to promote interactivity			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: Collaborative work is supported

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Team player skills are expected from the actors			

The forming of the group is supported			
Shared expertise between the group members is expected			
The group work is observed			
The group is working in a democratic manner			
The group work is intervened in case of a conflict or a problem			
Group work tools of the learning environment are used			
There is a balance between the individual work and group work			
The students are supported to take on different roles in the group			
Expectations are specified for participation in collaborative learning activities			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Role: Coordinator

Activities: Advise

Criterion: The students receive support related to the degree and studies in general

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the degree structure			
The students questions concerning the diploma and degree are answered within a predefined time limit			
The students receive information about the institution			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Coordination

Criterion: The coordination of the course is efficiently organized

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Different aspects are integrated to create the course			
There is a person in charge of the coordination			
The responsibility on the course is predefined			
The students are informed about the coordination in the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Criterion: The work of the different actors in the course is coordinated

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Staff is chosen according to the requirements of the course			
The actions of the different actors are in line with each others			
The methodological guidelines of the course are defined			
Conflicts and problems between the students and staff are managed			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Connections

Criterion: Connections outside the course are managed

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Relations to the actors inside the institution are managed			
Recourses available are taken advantage of			
The relations to actors outside the institution are managed			
The impact of the training and the course is evaluated from the students' point of view			

The impact of the course is evaluated from the institution's point of view			
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Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Role: Administrative support

Activities: Registration

Criterion: The students receive support during the registration process

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students are provided with relevant information about the course			
The registration is managed efficiently			
The registration is handled with confidence			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Records

Criterion: The students' records are managed properly

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students' records and grades are saved and filed			
The students' records are handled with confidence			
The students' academic files are updated after the course			
The student records and data are stored for a predefined time			
The students have a possibility to see their records and data			
The student records are delivered to necessary databases after the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Administrative tasks

Criterion: Institution academic norms are in sync with the course

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The course is in balance with the institution strategy			
The course is in balance with the discipline's objectives			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Role: Technical support

Activities: Designing the technical infrastructure

Criterion: Suitable technical tools are used to support learning

Indicators :	Yes	x	No
Technical tools are chosen according to the objectives of the course			
The technical tools are chosen considering the needs of the students			
The chosen tools are reachable for every student			
Alternative learning paths and medias are introduced			
Possible technical problems are identified before the course			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Personal technical support

Criterion: Technical support is available

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students receive information about the technical support available			
The students are encouraged to use the technical assistance and support			

Help is available for all the hardware necessary			
Help is available for all the software necessary			
The students' activities are observed and needed support is identified			
The teaching staff and other actors are informed about the occurring technical problems			
The students have alternative ways to contact tutor/tutors			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan) _____

Criterion: The students are provided with information of the used technology

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The students receive information about the required hardware and software before the course			
The students receive detailed information of the electronic media used			
The students receive information about the required technical competence			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Activities: Solving of the technical problems

Criterion: Personal support with the used technology is available for the students

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
A help desk is available for the students			
The help desk is reachable through different ways (phone, internet, face-to-face)			
The students have a possibility to ask questions concerning the used technology			
The technical problems are addressed quickly to prevent frustration			

Tolerance to the users' mistakes is expected from the technical support			
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Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan) _____

Activities: Access control

Criterion: Students are provided with access to the chosen technical solutions

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The protection of privacy and intellectual property is provided			
Access to learning environment is ensured			
Access to additional materials and resources are provided			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan)

Learning material design and production

Role: Learning material designer

Criterion: Learning materials are appropriate and up-to-date.

Indicators	Yes	x	No
Searches for learning materials in the internet are in use.			
Searches for learning materials from the databases of academic publishing are in use.			
Web-based dictionaries, encyclopaedias and e-books are in use.			
The digitalisation of the needed learning materials is taken care of.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Learning material has an easy access

Indicator	Yes	x	No
Learning material can be used without time restrictions.			
Learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards			
Learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Learning material is available on required languages

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Learning material is available in the languages required by the users.			
Language options are easily accessible from different parts of the material.			
Language options refer to different languages not to different countries.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The structure of the learning material matches the learning objectives

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The learning material is structured according to the goals set.			
The learning material is uniformly structured on the basis of cohesion.			
The subject matter of the material is outlined into integrated wholes.			
The learner can choose his/her own learning path, when studying the content			
The assignments and exercises have their due place in the structure of the material.			
The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the structure of the material.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The learning material is in accordance with the chosen pedagogical approach.

Indicators	Yes	x	No
The learning material is in accordance with the needs and the approaches of the learners.			
The tools and activities used buttress the pedagogical approach.			
The evaluation and exams are in line with and have a proper place in the learning material.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The proper and available tools are in use

Indicators	Yes	x	No
The hardware is accessible, efficient and easy to use.			
The software needed for utilisation for the learning material is available and easy to use.			
The tool is compatible with other tools and software.			
The tool fits the material, its structure and content.			
The saving methods are secure and extensive.			
The usage of tool enables the achievement of the objectives of learning materials.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The learning material is expediently designed

Indicators	Yes	x	No
Learning material is designed for recurrent usage.			
Learning material is designed for multiple usages so that access privileges, right to use or copyright allow the multiple usage of material.			
The resources and the maintenance of the learning material are expressed.			
The legal restraints for the maintenance and further development of the learning material are expressed.			
The user administration of the learning material is organised.			
Learning material is designed for storage in a repository accessible to all potential users.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Role: Learning material producer

Criterion: The cost of the production of learning material is reasonable.

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
The cost in money, manpower and other resources for the production are estimated.			
The costs for administration, maintenance and further development of the learning material are estimated.			
The total benefit of the learning material for the operational environment of the institution is evaluated.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The cost of the usage of learning material is reasonable.

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The pricing of chargeable learning material is explained to the learner.			
The price of the chargeable learning material is justified in relation to its production.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The content of the learning material is comprehensive

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The learners have been informed about the learning objectives.			
Required level of knowledge for the learning of material is stated out.			
Learning material covers the subject matter to be learned.			
Learning material is tagged to other information sources dealing with the same and related subject matters.			
Mode of deepening the knowledge is illustrated.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The content of the learning material is understandable

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Means of expression in the learning material comply with the accepted principles of production (e.g. principles of web writing).			
Terminology used in the learning material is known to the learners.			
Learning material is logically organised.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The content of the learning material is reliable

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
The content of the material is accurate (and authentic).			
The content of the material is up to date.			
The last update is announced.			
The authentic content is separated from other contents delivered with the learning material (e.g. bulletin boards, discussion forums, causeries, opinions, fiction, manipulated pictures, etc.).			
The information sources of the content are expressed clearly.			
Liability concerning the content is stated out.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The needs of the user groups and users concerning the learning material has been taken into account

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
Feedback mechanisms are established.			
Different use cases and operating situation of the learning material are analysed.			
Recurrence and duration of the usage of learning material is taken into account..			
The personification of the learning material is implemented with care.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The learners distinguish the different types of materials

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The learners can identify the core and the additional materials.			
The minimum and maximum requirements concerning the learning are spelled out.			
The learners may choose the level between minimum and maximum levels he/she aims at.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Role: Audio-visual planner

Criterion: The interface of the learning material is clear

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
Design (colours, font types and sizes and functional elements) is practical.			
Design is consistent supporting navigability.			
Functional elements (frames, linking elements, pop-ups, push-buttons, radio-buttons etc.) support the progression in the learning material.			
The vocabulary is coherent and consistent supporting navigability and the progression in the learning material.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The linking elements in the learning material are clear

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Linking elements (texts, push-buttons, and picture metaphors) describe clearly the path to the tagged object (web site, web page, tool, etc.).			
The keywords in name of the linking element and in the title of the tagged object are consistent.			
The linked objects are functional and up-to-date.			
All the users can progress using the linking elements (disabilities are taken into account).			

The usage of a linking element is shown by visual means.			
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Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Audiovisual design of the learning material is functional

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The learning material presented with different media (text, picture, graphics, animation, video, audio) promote the learning process.			
Different media elements are of good quality.			
Different media elements are compatible in usage.			
Media elements are delivered in common file formats.			
Users can administer the uploading of large media elements.			
Means of expression are appropriate (e.g. no flashing texts or pictures used).			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Role: Usability planner

Criterion: The learning material has an easy access.

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined.			
The learning material can be used without time restrictions.			
The learning material is provided with metadata according to the approved standards.			
The learning material can be reached through the services accessible to all the potential students.			
The user interface of the material is logically consistent.			
The user interface has all the functionalities that the learner needs.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The navigation and acting is easy to use

Indicator:	Yes	x	No
The navigation routes are clearly marked.			
The navigation is logically constructed.			
The communication, interaction and feedback channels can easily be found.			
The assignment, exercise and exam tools are at their proper places.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: Learning material is expediently delivered

Indicators:	Yes	x	No
Data security is taken into account in accordance with the existing rules.			
Confidentiality of the information used in the learning material is evaluated.			
User authentication is on a proper level.			
Authenticity and integrity of the saved information is secured.			
Public information on users is in accordance with the privacy rights.			

Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

Criterion: The usability of the learning material is tested

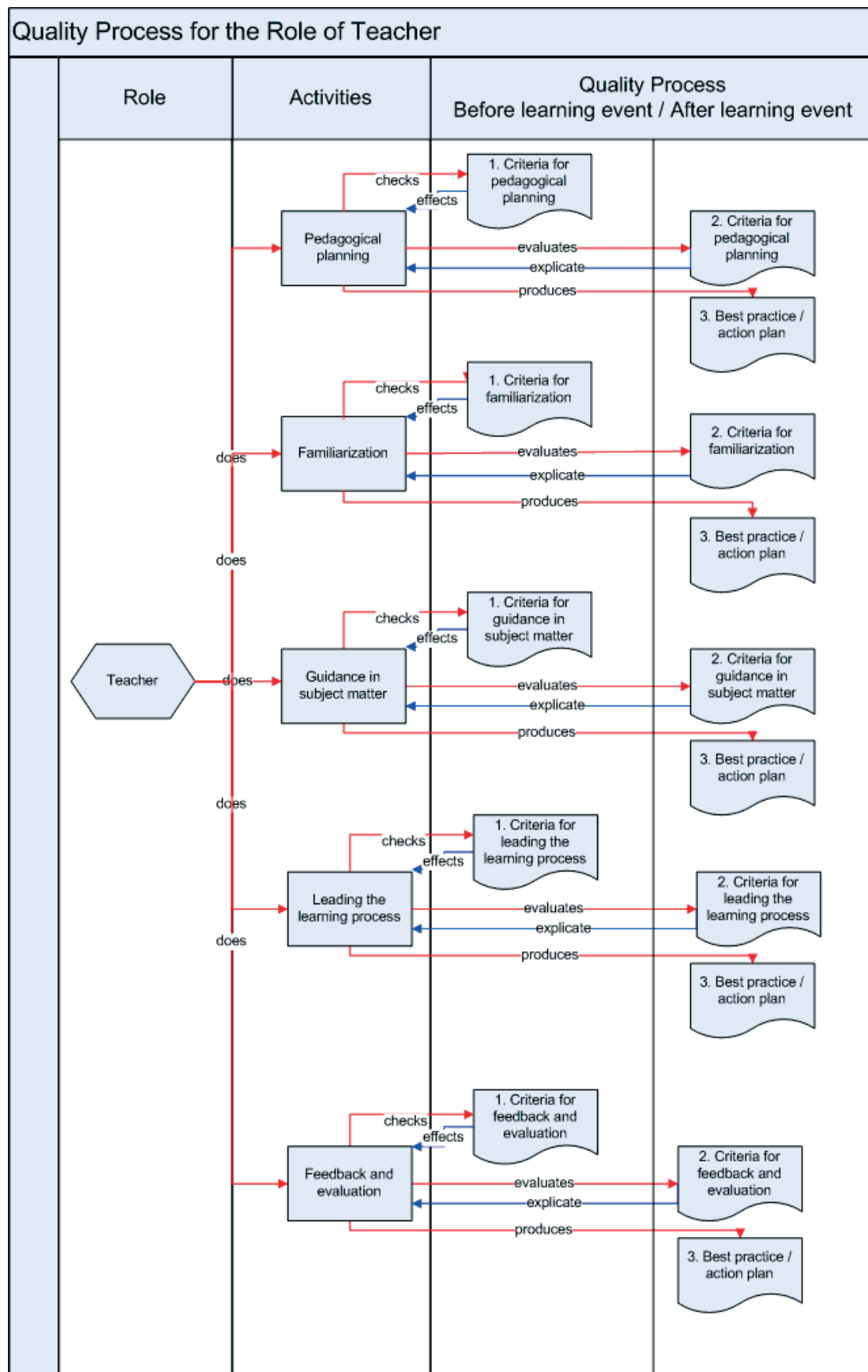
Indicators:	Yes	x	No
The level of the needed ICT skills of the learner is determined.			
Learning material is furnished with proper support and instructions.			
Learning materials in different formats are compatible.			
Needed materials and information sources are available.			
Communication, interaction and feedback channels are tested.			
Learning material can be accessed and used in different ICT environments.			
User privileges don't block out the potential users.			

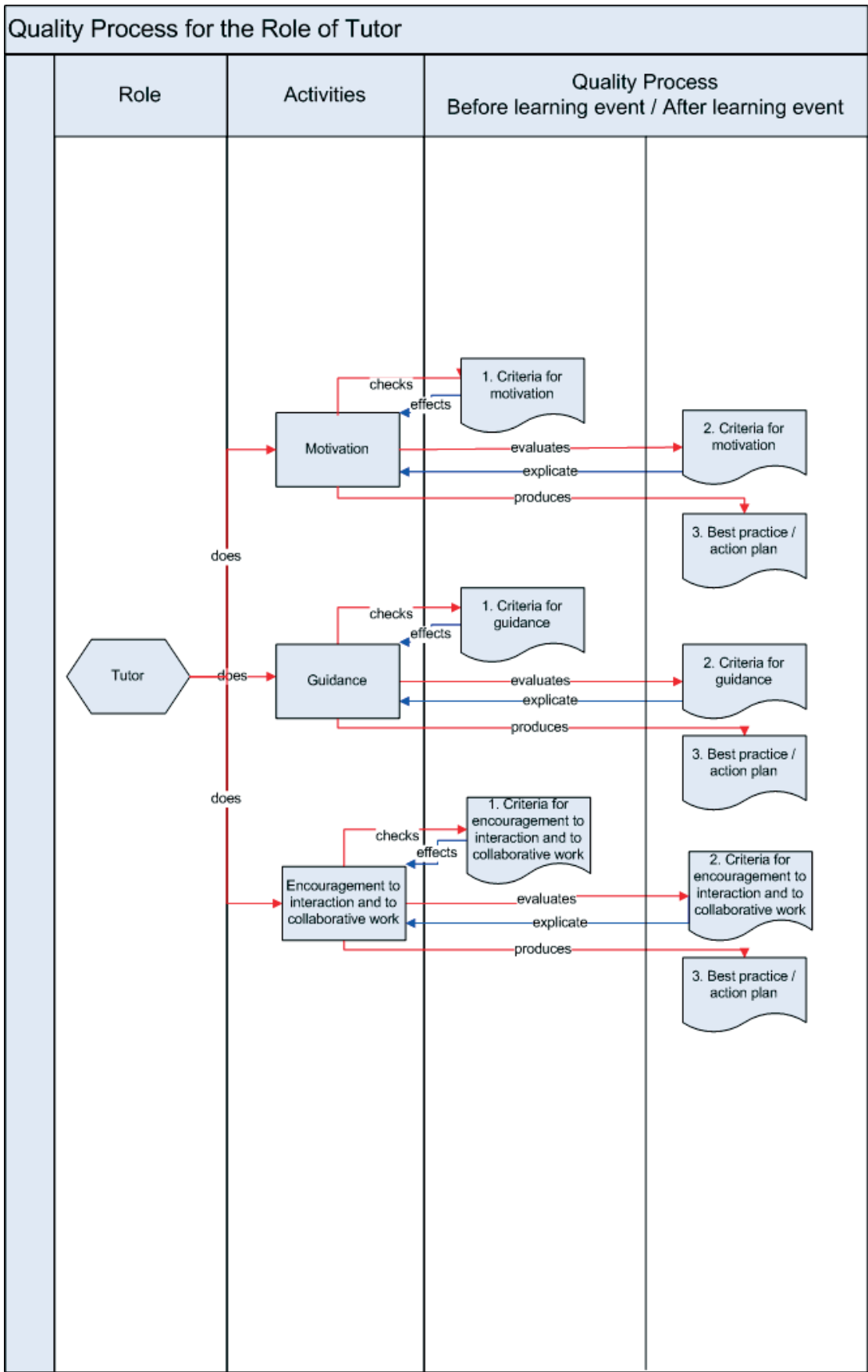
Overall estimation (1-5) _____

Analyse why this criterion was successfully performed (best practice) / Analyse what way the success of this criterion can be achieved in future (action plan).

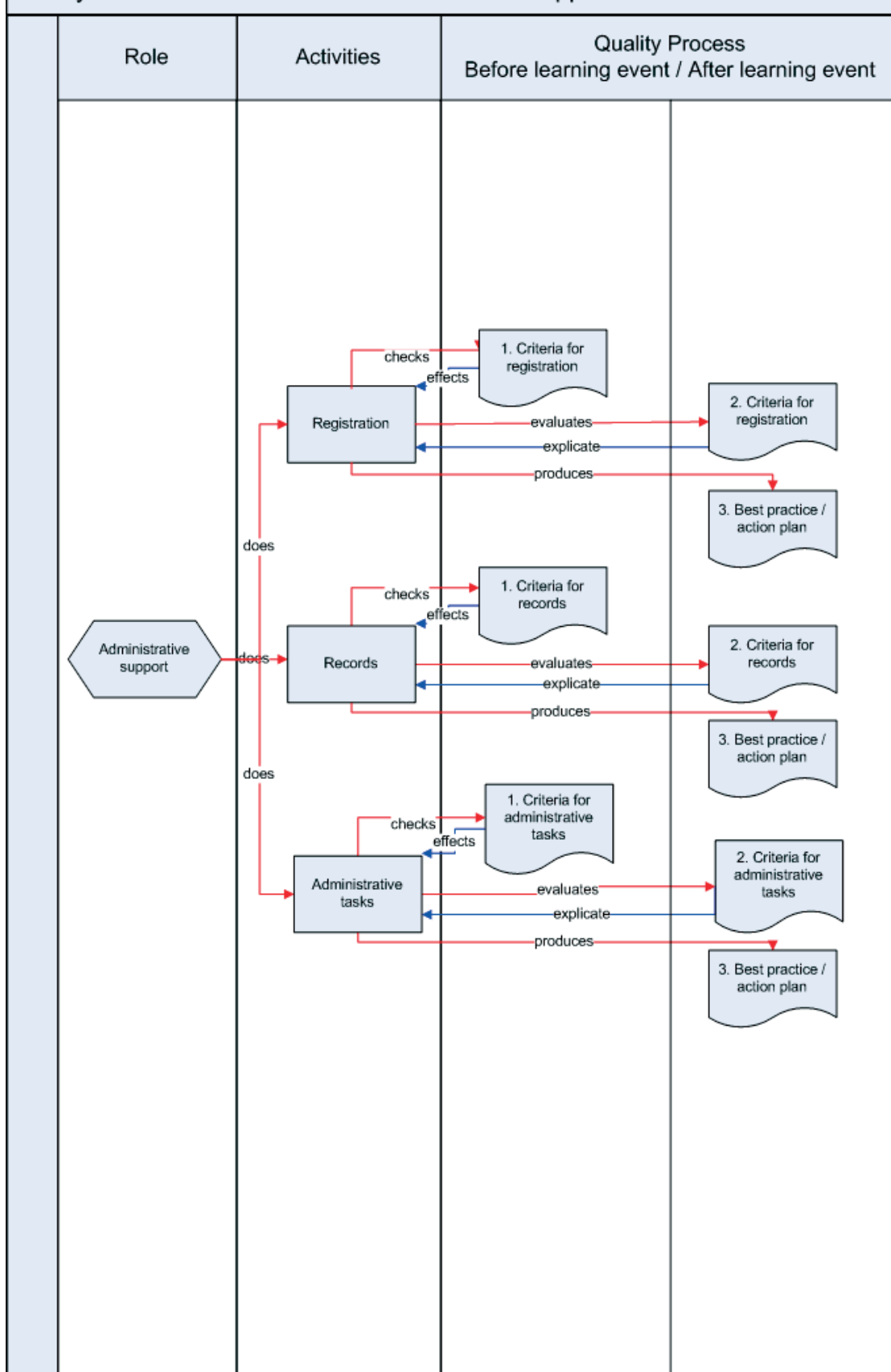
ANNEX 4.

Student Support: Quality process charts

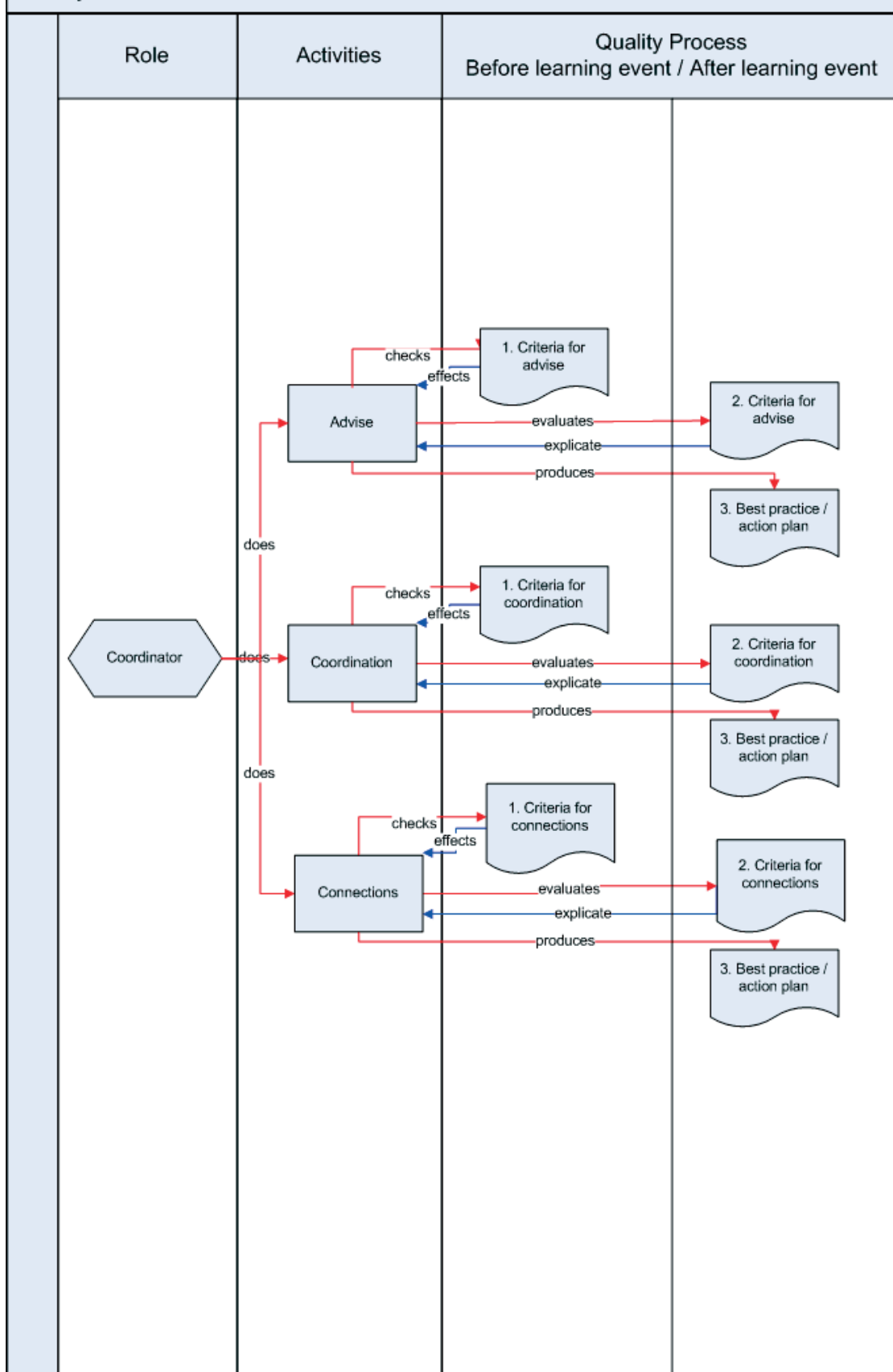




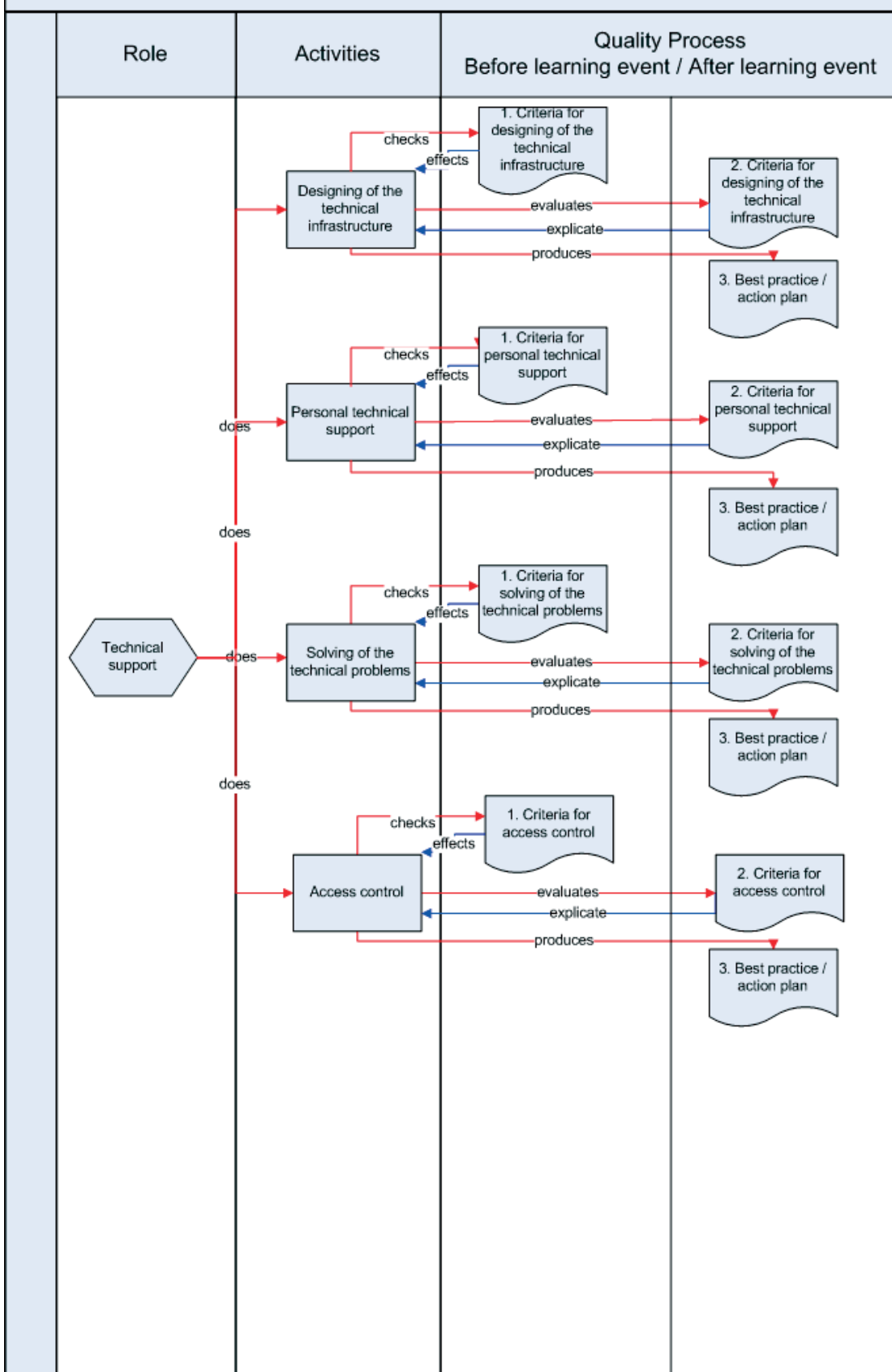
Quality Process for the Role of Administrative Support



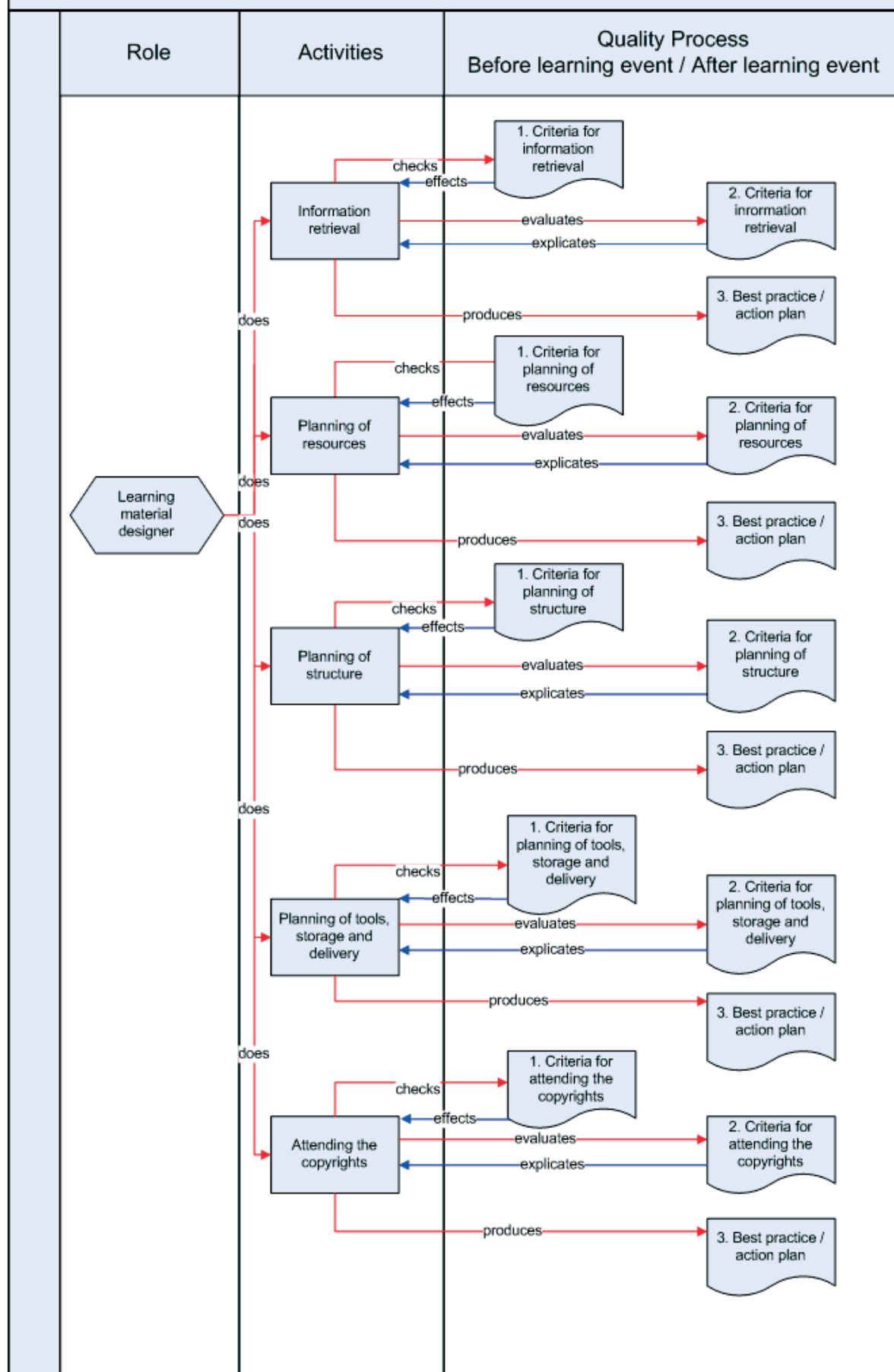
Quality Process for the Role of Coordinator



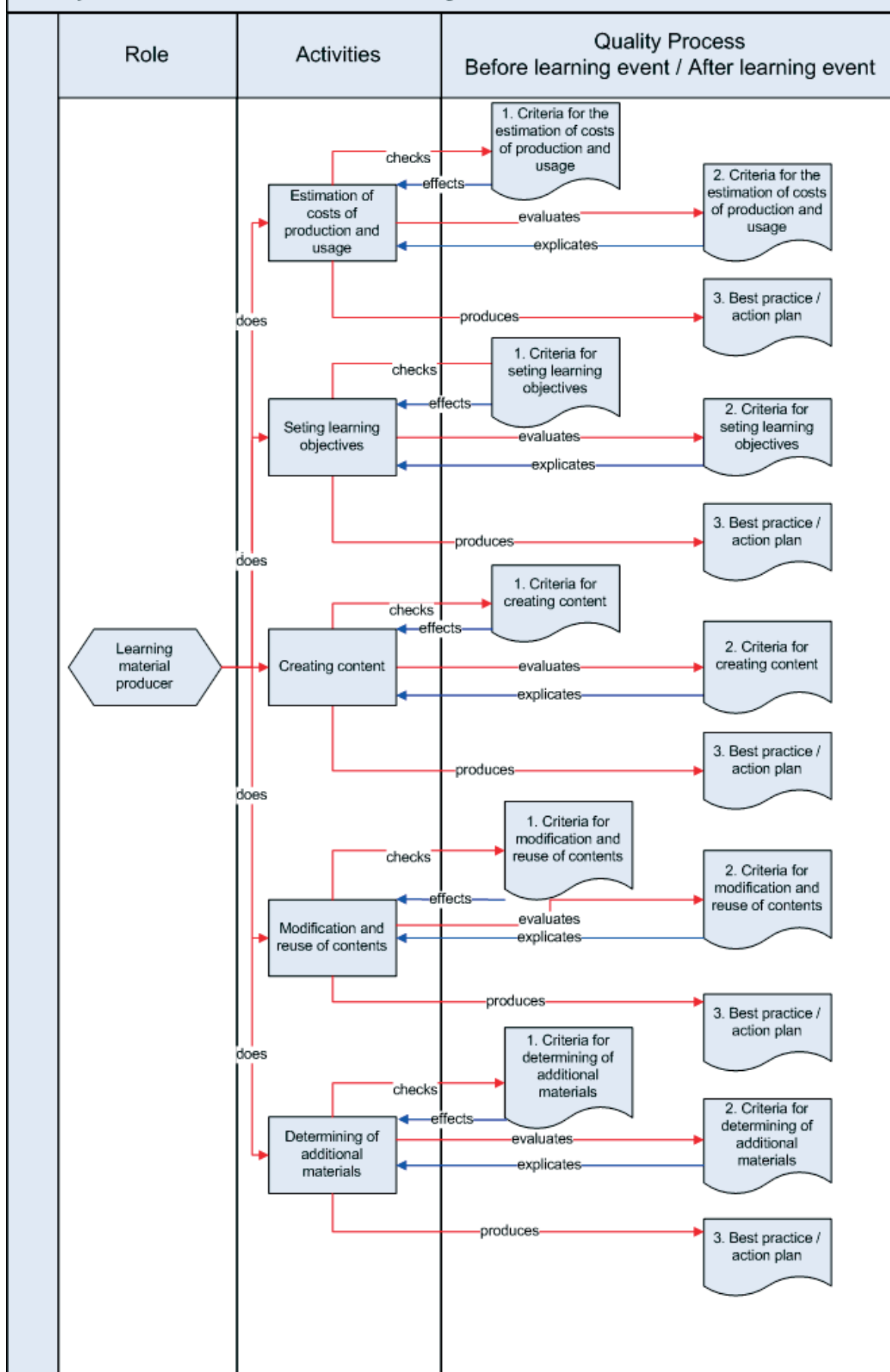
Quality Process for the Role of Technical support



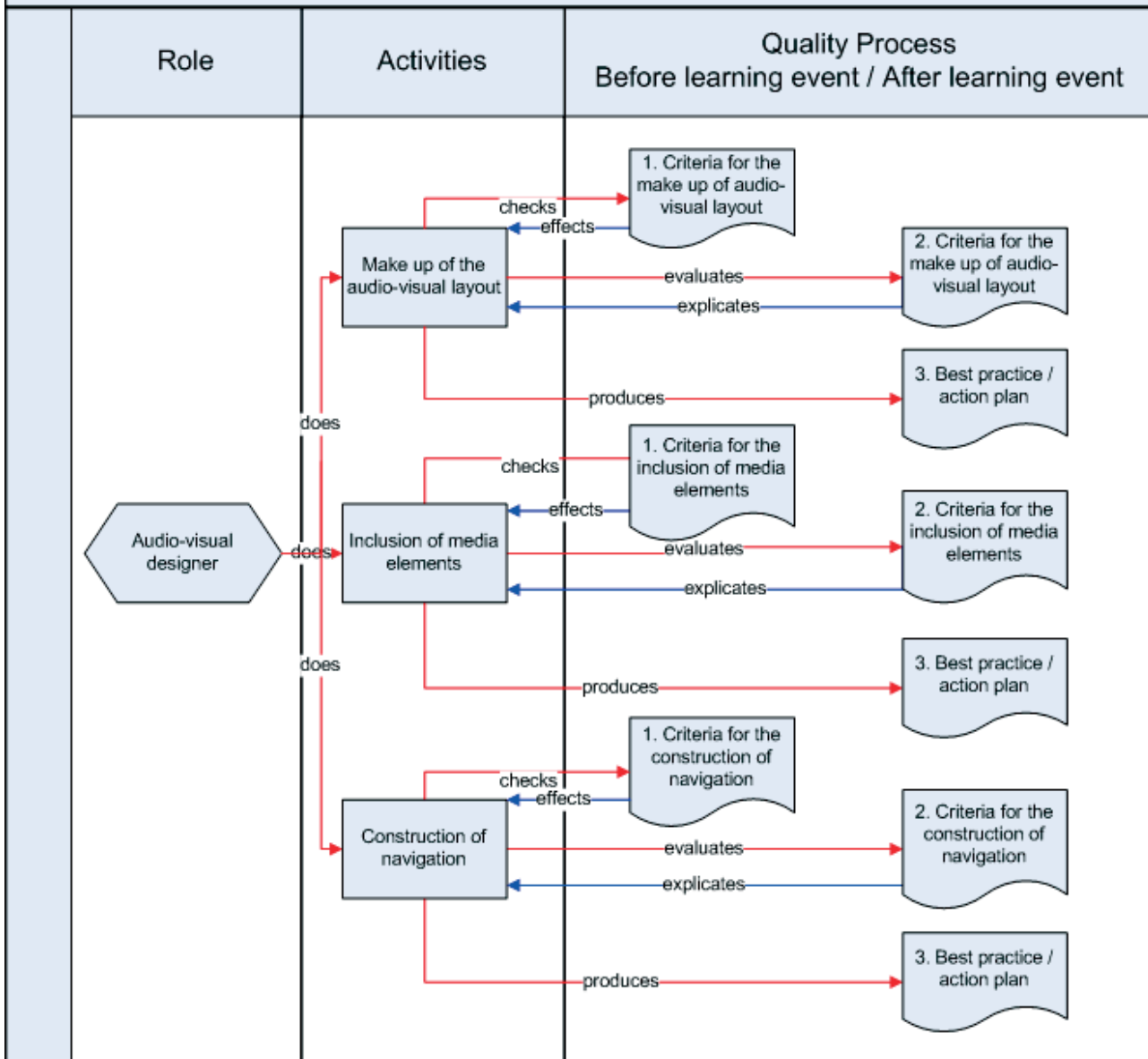
Quality Process for the Role of Learning Material Designer



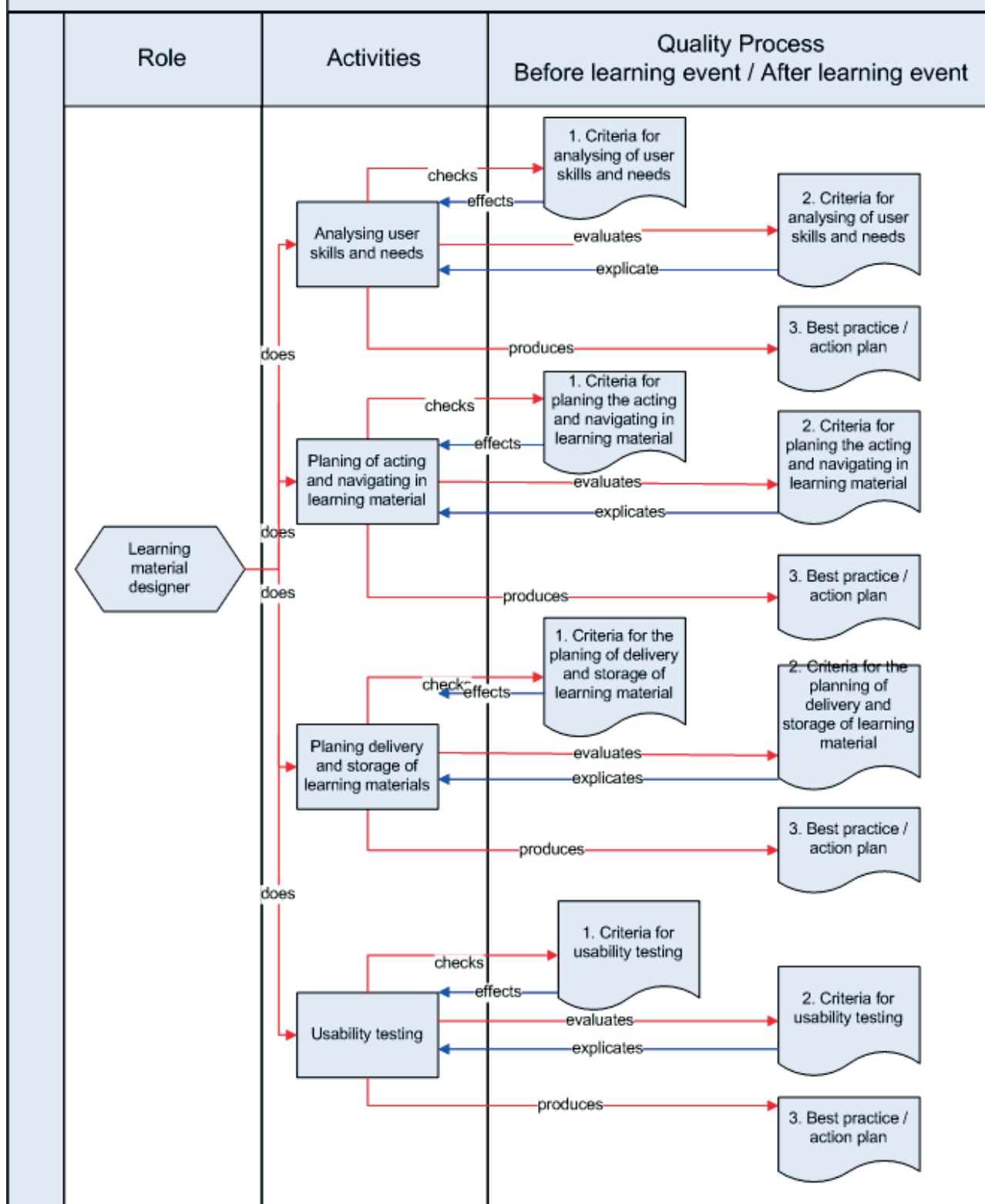
Quality Process for the Role of Learning Material Producer



Quality Process for the Role of Audio-visual Designer



Quality Process for the Role of Usability Planner





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Quality

Definitions and Perspectives



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Quality Implementation in Open and Distance Learning

- Matter of growing interest:
 - Bologna process
 - Experiences and understanding of ODL
 - Lack of suitable models
 - New research area
 - Standardization



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Quality in Education

- Can be examined from different perspectives and defined according to different stakeholders
 - whose needs are taken into consideration, and which objectives need to be fulfilled
- In education: determined by the learners' action, not only by the actions of the provider of education
 - Situation is therefore more complicated



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Perspectives

Categories according to objective:

1. Didactic and pedagogic perspective
2. Economic perspective
3. Social perspective
4. Consumer perspective
5. Management perspective

- Hajdakova, J. & Stehlikova, M. 2000. Quality assurance methods in higher education with special reference to existing courses –Part 1. In Olle Anckar (ed.) Quality assurance methods in higher education. The case of slovakia. Institutionen för Samhällsekonomi och Statistik. Ser. A:509.





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Quality Definitions

- How is quality understood and defined ?
- Quality definitions:
 1. Quality as exceptional
 2. Quality as perfection or consistency
 3. Quality as fitness for purpose
 4. Quality as value for money
 5. Quality as transformation



- Harvey, L. & Green, D. 1993. *Defining quality. Assessment and evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 18, No. 1



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Concepts

- Quality assurance
- Quality control
- Quality improvement
- Quality management
- Quality plan
- Quality policy





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Quality Standards and Models

- Standards are the level of requirements that must be achieved to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accrediting agency
- In education?

→ In most of the partner countries of e-Quality -project quality models, like ISO or EFQM, are not applied, because these have not been designed for educational purposes.



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ISO

– International Standardisation Organisation

- Emphasizes the concept of norm and standard
 - ISO standards objective is to make transparent the requirements that products must meet as well as the conformity assessment mechanisms for checking that those products measure up to standards.
 - from technical standards, solutions to problems of production and distribution, to standards for traditional activities and services
 - No ODL quality standard published by standards bodies





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National Quality Assurance Agencies

- All the countries of e-Quality –project have a specific agency on behalf of quality issues, although role and influence on individual institutions of these agencies varies:
 - Accreditation
 - Assessment
 - Audit
 - Benchmarking
 - Evaluation



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Bologna Process

- Important initiatives launched promoting quality
 - Higher education: Bologna process
- The ultimate goal is to create a common European Higher Education Area by 2010
 - One goal is to define and observe Europe-wide quality standards in higher education
 - Quality can be seen as a subject of fundamental mechanisms related with creation of European Area of Higher Education





National characteristics:

- Pressure to harmonize European education and simultaneously emphasize the different character, different needs and possibilities of individuals, education institutions and countries:

→ The culture, the tradition in educational systems, the structure and functioning of the organizations, the values of the teachers' collective

→ important influence in the implementation of quality approaches

→ should be taken into account in the design of quality work



Blocking Factors for ODL Quality Work

e-Quality project:

- Diversity in the concept of success in education
- Low value of pedagogical issues
- Focus in teaching instead of learning
- Low value of ODL and unrecognising of ODL teaching
- ODL is unofficial at the level of diplomas or other certificates
- Opposition to be externally evaluated
- Launching ODL courses is an individual decision
- Not understanding that new learning systems imply new role of the teacher and new services from the institutions





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Needs and Requirements

e-Quality –project:

- To introduce a more pedagogical point of view in quality systems (also pedagogical indicators)
- To introduce measures and indicators that make ODL training become as 'legal' as traditional courses
- To create quality certificates for ODL courses
- To redefine the critical processes in these institutions
- To define clear and key indicators
- To go in depth with the 'autonomy' or 'decentralization' of these institutions
- To establish the type of support that administrations should offer to universities

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Quality in Open and Distance Learning

- Standards and accreditation processes suitable for evaluating the quality of organizations: Not necessarily suitable for development and evaluation individual learning event
→ Actors involved with specific learning event need guidelines for quality assurance of their normal activities and ways to pursue quality through their own actions in their area of responsibility

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- Based on the foundation of existing quality work of institution, important thing is to examine how learning process and quality work, changes, when new learning environments are introduced
 - Processes of ODL
 - Support for students' learning (Student lifecycle)
 - Role and activities of actors in learning event
 - Best practices and blocking factors



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IT, ODL and the quality of learning

- Information technology, open and distance learning and the question of the quality of learning make up a complex whole
- Different attitudes and approaches towards technology and ODL determine how the question on quality is approached
- The relationships and problems between different definitions of IT, ODL condition how quality at different levels (EU, national, institutional, individual) are treated



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Information technology: definition

- “Information Technology (IT) or Information and Communication(s) Technology (ICT) is the technology required for information processing. In particular the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit, and retrieve information.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_Technology



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Information technology: context

- The definition of IT tells the scope of that particular technology among other technologies
- Defining IT does not reveal the assumptions, attitudes and approaches implicitly or explicitly connected with the utilisation of Information Technology
- Three approaches into technology: technological determinism, utilitarian understanding of technology and a tools perspective on technology





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Technological determinism

- Technology lead theory of social change according to which the development of technology causes the change independent of the will of human beings
 - Information technology inevitably changes the way in which the education in a society is organised and learning happens
 - The quality of learning is solely dependent on of the innovations generated by the development of information technology
- Two polarities of determinism: technological optimism and technological pessimism



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Determinism as optimism

- Determinism as optimism means blind faith in the power of technology to solve the social problems without value conflicts
- Emphasises the neutrality of technology in respect to the values
 - The development of ODL with the help of information technology opens access into learning for all because it makes the learning process independent of time and space
 - The quality of learning is determined by standardised information technological systems through the compatibility of these systems





Determinism as pessimism

- According to the pessimistic view the development of technology is out of human control and leads into the subordination of individuals into the domination of technology
 - ODL abolishes the human interaction from teaching and learning subjugating individuals into extensions of computers and information
 - The quality of learning can be talked only in the context of human interaction, when it produces a qualitative change in the learner



Utilitarian understanding of technology

- The relationship between technology and society is determined by the expected total gain from the utilisation of particular technology
- Technology and technological systems are valuable, when they are cost effective and intensify work performances
 - ODL with information technology enables institutions to offer education for wide audiences in a cost effective manner
 - The quality of learning is established by the standardization of information systems and software and by harmonisation of the institutional requirements for education
- Standardisation and harmonisation is achieved with the help of quality strategies and quality work; top-down
- An example: information society programmes from mid 1990's to present day

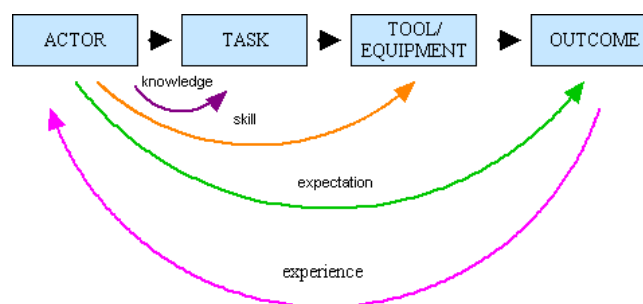


Technology as an equipment or a tool

- The approach into technology from the perspective of work performances of individual actors
- The value of technology is determined by it's applicability in fulfilling different tasks and emphasises the knowledge and skills of different actors in the utilising process of technology
 - ODL facilitates the educational personnel to plan, produce and deliver educational contents in a new, flexible and efficient way
 - The quality of learning depends on the collaboration and interplay between different actors participating into the production of learning events bring about learning processes
- The approach emphasises the knowledge and skills of actors, which are directed simultaneously into the thing to be done and the tools needed in the process of doing or making



Technology as a tool





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The importance of the tools perspective

- Brings technology to the practical level of everyday work
- Emphasises the linkage between knowledge and skills; to know the content of the task creates the conditions for selection of tools, but at the same time selection of tools is conditioned by their usefulness in relation to the outcomes

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Open and Distance Learning



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Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

- What do we mean by ODL?
 - Open and Distance Learning
 - Distance Learning
 - eLearning
 - combines the key concept of openness with idea of distance learning
 - embraces most of the present interests and emphases in the field
 - is widely used in Europe at a moment
 - Understanding the core concepts is important, because concepts embodies statements and attitudes towards learning





Two concepts

Open Learning (OL):

- emphasizes:
 - openness, student-centeredness, flexibility, equality
 - different learning styles
 - independent learning
- wider concept than distance learning
- a philosophy or attitude towards teaching and learning

Distance learning (DL):

- a mode of delivering a course
- communication by electronic and other technology
- without face-to-face contact
- four generations:
 - correspondence systems
 - educational TV and radio
 - multimedia systems
 - internet-based systems



Definitions

- "The term *open and distance learning* reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner, and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility, whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of structure.
- → The emergence of new forms of distance learning based on new information and communication technologies: significant pedagogical, economic and organizational implications." (UNESCO 2002)
- UNESCO. 2002. Open and Distance Learning. Trends, policy and Strategy considerations.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001284/128463e.pdf>



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- "Involves the use of new methods - technical and/or non-technical to improve flexibility and feasibility of learning in terms of space, time, choice of content, or teaching resources and/or improve access to educational systems from distance." (EU's, Socrates & Youth Technical Assistance Office, 1995)
- "The tools and software used in ODL are often quite the same as in DL, but there is a shift in emphasis from a more teacher-centered environment towards an open learner-centered and virtual learning environment with a focus on distributed expertise and cognitive tools and groupware." (Tella, S.)
- Tella, S. (1998): The Poor Relation of the Education System? Aspects of Distance Education and Open and Distance Learning. In: Nummi, T., Roenkae, A., Sariola, J. (Eds.): Virtuality and Digital Nomadism. Media Education Publications (6), University of Helsinki (1-22).



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Related concepts

- Open and Distance Learning (ODL)
 - Open Learning (OL)
 - Flexible Learning (FL)
 - Distance Education (DE)
 - Distance Teaching (DT)
 - Distance Learning (DL)
- Distributed Learning
- Flexi-Mode Learning
- Blended learning
- Mixed-mode Learning





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- Distance education:
 - The term "distance" has become unsuitable to some cases. Learning technologies are increasingly used "on-campus", not from distance.
 - Emphasizes the technology, but by offering more flexible ways to study, highlights the students perspective.
- Blended learning, mixed-mode learning:
 - Reflects the situation where new technologies are used alongside with traditional methods



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eLearning

- Any technologically mediated learning using computers whether from a distance or in face to face classroom setting (computer assisted learning)
 - The delivery of a learning or education by electronic means
 - The fourth generation of distance learning
- It is recognised that eLearning is not merely new delivery mode of teaching, but it changes the roles of teacher and students, requires new perspectives from actors, and thus demands the reflection of actions and methods and their suitability in new learning environments.





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Student's lifecycle and learning event

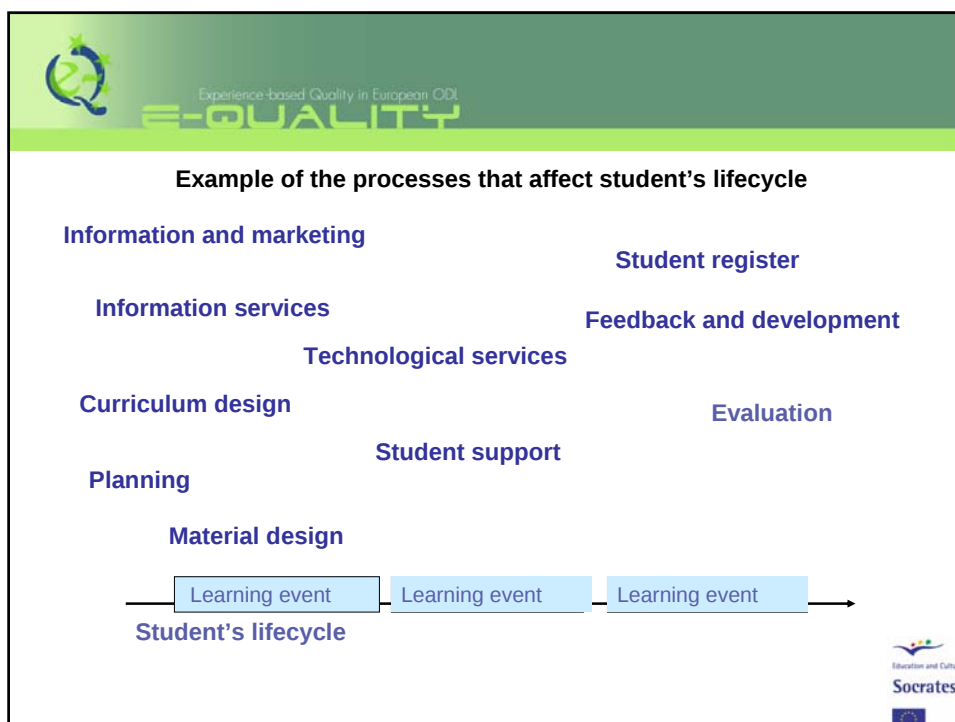
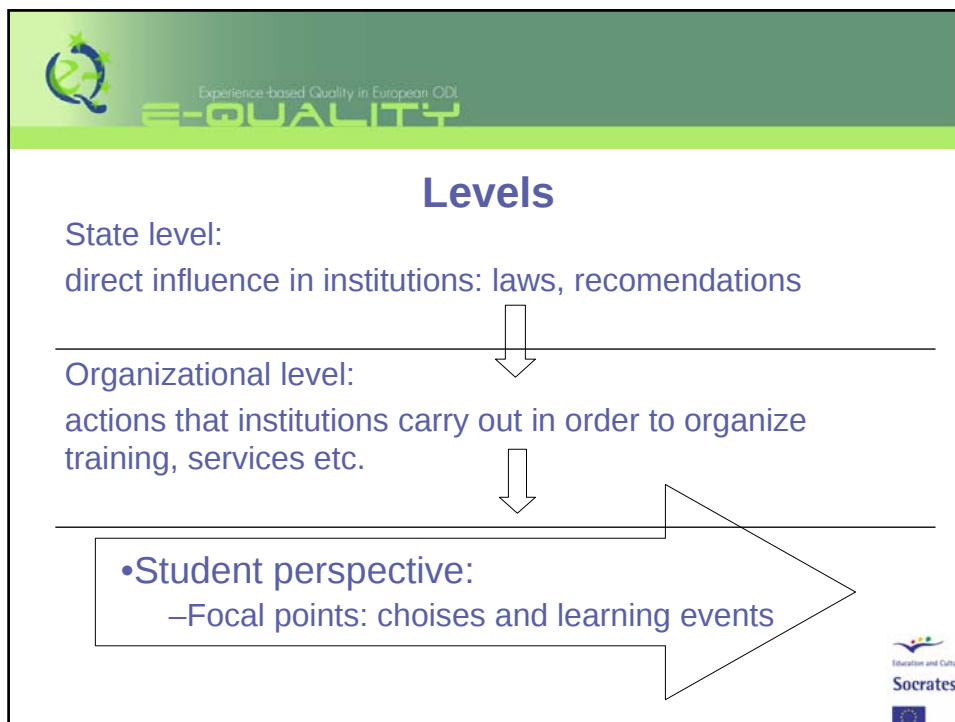


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Student's lifecycle

- Student's lifecycle can be described as a path that individual student follows through studies
- Way to specify the various phases and processes that students encounter.
- These processes consists of institutional structures and individual choises: Interplay of student's individual goals and possibilities of curriculum and institution.







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Learning event

- In new learning environments: Learning event (traditionally: teaching event)
- emphasizes the process and active role of student
 - Learner is active actor in learning event, searching information, making observations and asking questions
 - Important thing is how learner is able to use provided information
 - Learning event is key moment in students learning process.

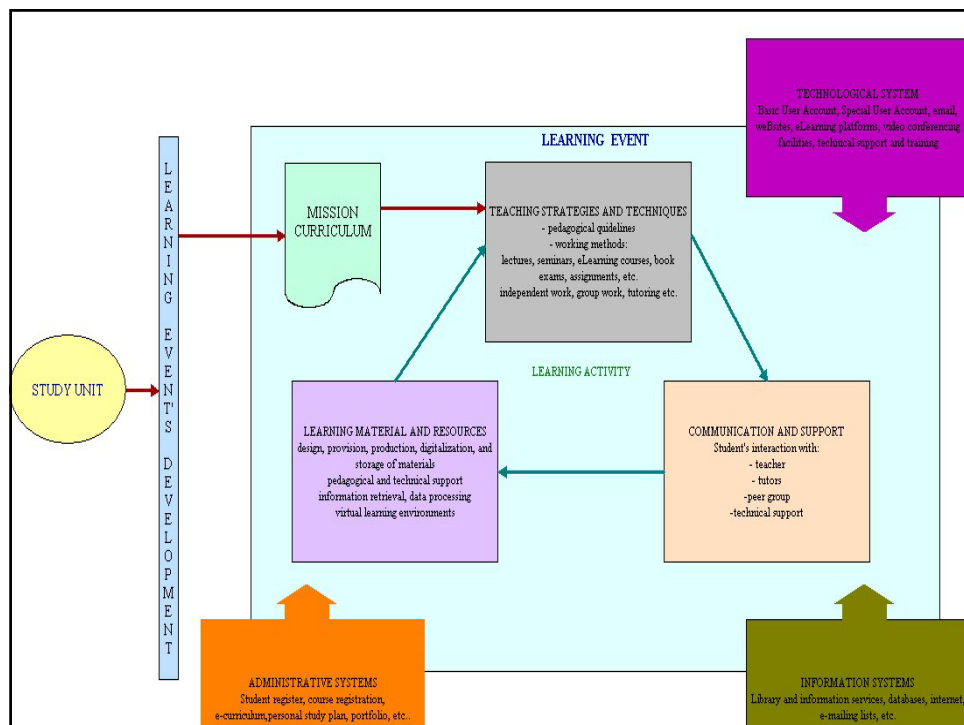


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Learning event consists of four aspects

- Learning environment (where)
 - physical or virtual setting where learning takes place
 - both physical environment as well as information, ideas, fellow learners, activities and experiences.
- Learner (who)
 - active role
- Event (when)
 - when learning takes place
- Contents to learn (what)
 - not necessarily ready-made materials, but information to work with







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Teaching strategies and techniques:

- Pedagogical guidelines define the structure, the working methods and the activities of the course.
- Roles related to planning, administration and organizing the learning event are emphasized.
 - affect greatly to success of the learning event, and lack of these roles or their failure is surely noticed.
- pedagogical guidelines, working methods



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Communication and support:

- Interaction between different actors
- Interaction between student and peer group and between student and teacher, tutor and support personnel. Roles that supports knowledge transfer and shared expertise are the key roles.



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Learning materials and resources:

- Besides actors also materials and other resources constitute the core of learning event
 - by individual teacher or by group of colleagues.
- There should be both pedagogical and technical support available for teachers.
- design, provision, production and digitalization of materials, information retrieval and learning environments





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Information system:

- Possibilities for information retrieval and processing.
 - services for personnel and students. Usually offered by libraries and by other information service units.



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Technological systems:

- Technological system surrounds every learning event.
- Technological infrastructure, e.g. computer classrooms, videoconferencing facilities, and support services for students and teachers.





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Administrative systems:

- Administration handles the student register, course registration etc.
- Administrative services are provided by institution, department, faculty and units.





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Quality Criteria

Principles



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The Purpose of the Quality Criteria

- to improve quality of ODL by indicating the essential activities promoting quality in different processes.
- to help recognize best practices and blocking factors.
- to act as a guidelines and support media for the development of education in a new situation with new technologies.
- to function as a tool for quality assurance





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- to function as a learning process for the whole team working with the course.
- to increase the understanding of the success of different areas.
- to act as a comparison when looking for best practices and examples for the improvement of ODL.
- to function as a quality guarantee or recommendation in relation to students, other users and producers of ODL.



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The focal points are:

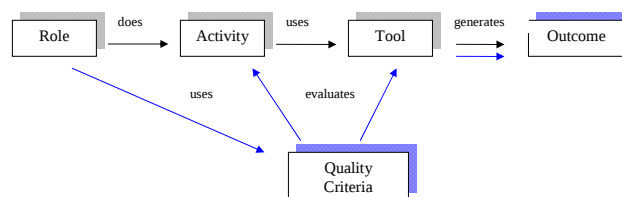
1. Criteria are developed to improve the quality of ODL from the students' point of view. Therefore the criteria are focused on the actions enhancing students' learning.
2. Criteria are created for two sub processes, student support and learning material production.
3. The e-Quality -project is examining the quality from the actors' point of view and is introducing the concepts of role and activity to ODL. By identifying the roles also the criteria for the activities of these roles can be found.





Conceptual relations of quality criteria

- The relationships between roles, activities, tools and quality criteria and indicators.
- 1) Roles are for doing an activity. 2) Activities are performed by using tools. → A person carrying a role can evaluate both the activity he/she is performing and the tools she/he is using with the help of quality criteria.



The quality criterion can help in answering three questions at the same time:

- *What actions do I have to take in order to fulfil this activity in order to guarantee good quality of the learning event?*
- *What tools can I use and how should I use them to guarantee good quality of the learning event?*
- *How can I generate best practices for my work with the help of quality criteria?*



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Structure of Criteria

- Criteria indicate the related activities. Criteria have been divided under roles to identify the responsible role.
- Every criterion consists of indicators that explicates and specifies the criterion.
- By comparing declarative sentences, indicators, to situation in individual course, an overall estimation on how this criterion is realised in course can be made.

→ **Understanding of the situation:**
improvements needed, practices to maintain



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The use of quality criteria

Three step of utilizing the criteria:

1. **Before the learning event:** Criteria as a checklist indicating the quality of the planning and matters need to be taken into account.
2. **After the learning event:** Criteria as an evaluation tool indicating the quality of learning event.
3. **After evaluation:** Criteria as a tool for generating the experiences and insight gained from the evaluation into best practices and action plan.





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1. Before the learning event:

- Criteria as a checklist, evaluation of planning
- Steps:
 1. Mark after each indicator if it has been taken into account in planning or not.
 2. Describe after each criterion what way it is going to be realised and performed in the learning event and what tools are going to be used.



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2. After the learning event

- Tool for evaluating the quality of learning event
- Steps:
 1. Compare each indicator to the situation in your course. Mark after each indicator does it corresponds to your case.
 2. After gone through all the indicators of specific criterion, examine the results and give an overall estimation on how this criterion is realised in your course. Decides the weight of the indicators and how they affect the total grading of the criterion.





3. After evaluation

- Tool for generating one's experiences into best practices and action plan
- Tool for making best practices explicit
- Steps:
 1. After evaluation go through estimations of every criterion. Write down your conception of what aspects of the criterion are in order and what aspects need to be improved.



The limits of quality criteria

- The processes of ODL can not be described in same exactness as e.g. industrial processes.
 - a number of feeding processes with specific institutional, cultural, and even personal characteristics have an effect on these processes.
 - circumstances like the starting level of the students, the available technical infrastructure etc. have an influence on the success of the learning event.



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- The objective of quality criteria is learning with good quality, but the sole usage of indicators does not function as an overall and immutable blueprint for high quality learning.
- To produce good quality learning requires that the whole planning and organisation of the education is in a good condition quality assessment and assurance being just a part of it.



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For the development of criteria this means that:

- *the different sets of criteria should be under constant redesign according to the demands caused by the changes in institutional and organisational factors of the development of higher education including different blocking factors*
- *the development of information technology as it introduces new tools for education should be observed in the constant redesign of the criteria*

