

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LIFELONG LEARNING

ENDIKA BENGOETXEA, OUTI KALLIOINEN, IMMO SCHMIDT-JORTZIG, RICHARD THORN

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Table of contents

Foreword.....	4
Chapter 1: Quality Assurance in Higher Education Lifelong Learning: Objectives and challenges on the European Union	5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Main European challenges in the quality assurance of lifelong learning	6
1.3 Examples of good practice and main barriers	7
1.4 Conclusion.....	8
Chapter 2: Internal Quality Assurance at Laurea University of Applied Sciences Finland – Integrating Learning and Research	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Learning by Developing (LbD) – a pedagogical innovation at Laurea	10
2.3 Development of perspective - planning, implementation, evaluation and development of Laurea’s activities.....	11
2.4 Results of the FINHEEC audit at Laurea in 2010	14
2.5 Conclusion	16
References.....	17
Chapter 3: Quality Assurance for non-degree programmes.....	18
3.1 Introduction	18
3.2. Lifelong Learning.....	18
3.2.1. Development of Lifelong Learning.....	18
3.2.2. Challenges of Lifelong Learning	19
3.3. Quality assurance	19
3.3.1. The importance of Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning	19
3.3.2. Certification process.....	20
3.4 Future perspectives and challenges	20
Chapter 4: Lifelong Learning and European Higher Education Institutions – the FLLLEX Project.....	22
4.1 The EU and LLL Participation.....	22
4.2 The Part Time Learner Experience.....	23
4.3 The FLLLEX Project	24
4.4 Conclusions	26
References.....	27
Conclusions.....	28
Annex 1.....	29

Foreword

The implementation of Lifelong Learning (LLL) in European higher education institutions is one of the most important educational and career development oriented initiatives of this decade. Albeit an essential path in the continuous improvement of skills, competences and knowledge throughout the life of an individual, this project is also challenging, as it involves expectations not only from the educational, the social and the professional worlds, but employers and employees as well. Moreover, the fact that expectations and demands may vary nationally, regionally and locally demands understanding, transparency and coordination between lifelong learning providers.

The quality assurance of implementing Lifelong Learning into European higher education institutions is currently part of ENQA's main focus areas. ENQA is promoting debates on how to develop quality assurance processes for lifelong learning schemes. In order to contribute to joint understanding of the quality assurance in Lifelong Learning between all stakeholders, to disseminate information on good practice, and to discuss standards and procedures, ENQA organised a workshop on the theme "Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning" that was held in May 2011 in Bonn, Germany. The workshop provided a platform for discussion and exchange of experiences among the main stakeholders in quality assurance.

This publication presents four articles based on the workshop on Lifelong Learning. The following articles will discuss the national experiences, observations and results from the perspectives of the European Commission, the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland, the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) in Germany, and the Institutes of Technology in Ireland.

ACHIM HOPBACH

President

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

CHAPTER 1:

Quality Assurance in Higher Education Lifelong Learning: Objectives and challenges on the European Union

Endika Bengoetxea, European Commission, Belgium

1.1 Introduction

The European Union's Europe 2020 strategy¹ sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century, with a strong focus on skills and lifelong learning. It shows how the EU can come out stronger from the crisis and how it can be turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It includes a European benchmark for raising the proportion of higher education graduates (in the age range 30–34 years) to 40% by 2020.

The strategic framework for co-operation in Education and Training for 2020 –ET2020²– focuses on four key areas:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality (including a European benchmark that by 2020 at least 15% of adults (age group 25–64) should participate in lifelong learning);
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship.

Given the need for Europe to raise skill levels and provide high quality education and training, it is no coincidence that lifelong learning and quality assurance figure as two of these priorities. The European Commission is cooperating actively with member states and stakeholders³ on reforms and follow-up.

Since the Bologna process started in 1999, there has been considerable improvement in building a higher education quality assurance culture in Europe, although efforts are still required to improve cooperation at European level. At the same time, quality assurance and transparency tools may need to evolve in order to remain up to date, as for instance, the European Standards and Guidelines which are at present under review⁴.

1 The Europe 2020 strategy is the European political agenda for a more smart, sustainable and inclusive knowledge-based growth : <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020>

2 The overall basis for EU-wide cooperation in education and training is set out in the “ET 2020” strategic framework adopted in May 2009: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

3 Two Recommendations for cooperation in quality assurance in higher education encourage cooperation between accreditation and evaluation agencies at European level: Council Recommendation (EC) No 561/98 of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education [Official Journal L 270 of 7.10.1998]; and Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (2006/143/EC)

4 This review is taking place in the LLP/Erasmus centralised project 510502-2010-FI with the title “Mapping the implementation and application of the Standards and Guidelines for the Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, expected to finish the 31st March 2012.

While much of the focus of quality assurance is on initial training courses and degrees, developing quality assurance mechanisms for continuous training is also essential. More than ever, education systems are required to offer training courses and modules that ensure the right mix of skills, and lifelong learning activities must ensure that people improve knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. As part of this strategy, higher education quality assurance systems must also play their role in guaranteeing that quality assurance mechanisms are established for continuous training courses.

The need to develop flexible study paths is also a priority: the percentage of 'non-traditional' groups (such as part-time students) seeking training is increasing, but there are not yet sufficient initiatives to satisfy this demand. Furthermore, these mature learners express a particular concern about the quality of the educational offer, which calls for a more direct involvement of quality assurance systems in lifelong learning.

1.2 Main European challenges in the quality assurance of lifelong learning

A principal challenge for European education systems remains the need for a genuine lifelong learning culture that supports, values and recognises all learning activity undertaken throughout life, either this being formal, non-formal or informal. This is especially critical in this period of crisis where lifelong learning should satisfy the need for creating new career pathways and second chances for people.

Quality assurance mechanisms need to be established to ensure that the existing provision for lifelong learning fulfills its aims. A number of European tools have proved to be useful for this task, such as the European Key Competences Framework for Lifelong Learning; the European Qualifications Framework (complemented by national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes being developed by Member States); the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET); the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET); and the European Guidelines for validating informal and non-formal learning, the European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning, and the open method of coordination. The Lifelong Learning Programme reinforces this focus on quality by funding special projects in this field, and is complemented by other activities such as the University-Business Forum.

The key to success and to ensuring optimum impact of these tools is cooperation between stakeholders from all levels and sectors relevant for lifelong learning, in particular between education and training, employment and social affairs, and across national, regional and local levels. There is obviously a great diversity of actors involved. Special efforts are needed to ensure coordination and to avoid a focus solely on each stakeholder's own priorities, so as to be able to implement sustainable lifelong learning policies in Europe without delay.

This broad cooperation is needed at several levels in order to implement quality assurance mechanisms for higher education: the European Commission plays a supporting role through the open method of coordination and through Lifelong Learning Programme projects; Member States are responsible for establishing sustainable lifelong learning strategies; and higher education institutions are the ones to deliver.

1.3 Examples of good practice and main barriers

With some exceptions, higher education institutions are not yet very active in lifelong learning, despite the fact that the economic crisis has brought an important increase in the demand for continuous training.

Some of the attitudinal barriers that exist in higher education towards lifelong learning could be overcome by targeted measures and incentives to encourage institutions to actively get involved in lifelong learning activities. The main task for higher education institutions is to cater for, and adapt the training offer to ever more numerous non-traditional learners: for example, the need to design and deliver continuous training courses catering for both currently employed and unemployed people willing to re-orientate their career; the recognition of prior-learning; and provide second-chance opportunities for accessing higher education. Implementing flexible study paths and programmes are essential in order to meet the needs of these target groups.

The European Commission has funded several projects that are considered examples of good practice in this field. For example, “BEFLEX PLUS – Progress on Flexibility in the Bologna Reform”⁵, coordinated by the European Association for University Lifelong Learning, which analyses how lifelong learning in higher education is developing in Europe, and describes how Bologna tools can be used for developing policy and practice by higher education institutions. One of the final recommendations of this successful project stresses the need for institutions to ensure that curriculum partnerships are part of the quality assurance arrangements of the university and that the diversity of learners, of the pedagogical objectives, of the modes of participation are all taken into account along with the needs of the partners.

The need for quality assurance systems to embrace challenges in lifelong learning is also underlined in the European Universities Charter on Lifelong Learning⁶. For quality assurance systems to ensure that lifelong learning initiatives fulfil their objectives, flexibility in quality assurance mechanisms is required to be able to evaluate the quality of non-traditional higher education. Assessing the quality of lifelong learning courses on the same terms as traditional courses could restrict the openness, flexibility and transparency of such initiatives. The European dimension of quality assurance is very relevant for this flexibility to be a reality. The experience of difficulties faced by joint degrees oriented to initial training could be even more complex in the case of joint degrees oriented to continuous training, and the European quality assurance system has an important role to fulfil in ensuring that these initiatives can become successful.

In this respect, master courses should be regarded as an integral part of Europe’s lifelong learning strategy and not just as initial education training leading to registration in a PhD or to a professional practice. The centralised actions of Erasmus have funded several examples of good practice, oriented specifically to professionals such as the European Master’s Degree in Oral Laser Applications, coordinated by the University of Liège⁷.

5 Project number 134538-LLP-1-2007-1-BE-ERASMUS-EMHE, funded through the Lifelong Learning programme as an Erasmus Multilateral Project. Website: <http://www.eucen.eu/BeFlexPlus/index.html>

6 “European Universities’ Charter on Lifelong learning”, published in 2008 by the European University Association. http://www.eua.be/typo3conf/ext/bzb_securelink/pushFile.php?cuid=1663&file=fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_Charter_Eng_LY.pdf

7 This master course is focused on dental practitioners with professional experience. It rewards a triple degree from the three participating universities of Liège, Nice-Sophia Antipolis, and Aachen, and has the vocation of becoming a joint degree. Project number 28133-IC-1-2004-1-BE-ERASMUS-PROGUC-2, funded through the Socrates programme as a curriculum development project. Website: <http://www.laser-master-dentistry.com/home.htm>

Another important area for improving European quality assurance systems is through strengthening bridges and exchange of good practice between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE). Cooperation between HE and VET institutions is essential especially in continuous training, where some graduates could find VET level training more adequate for developing some skills, while VET can benefit from higher education in specific expertise. A further challenge for higher education quality assurance systems is to position themselves internationally and be more transparent and comparable, especially in stimulating mobility between VET and higher education.

Quality assurance systems are very different within the sector, between sectors and between countries. Differences involve quality assurance tradition, size of institutions, student population, extent of state control, and priorities. That is why the focus should not be on building one integrated quality assurance system for all sectors, but rather on more transparency and better understanding of the different quality assurance systems, and on practical cooperation between the main quality assurance actors in different sectors, in particular on resolving bottlenecks for recognition of qualifications. An important advantage is that both VET and higher education have the common language of learning outcomes. The link between European and national qualification frameworks could act as a catalyst for building bridges.

1.4 Conclusion

To make lifelong learning a reality, education and training systems should make a stronger effort towards really open, flexible and transparent education. This requires cooperation between European, national and regional/local levels, but it also calls for quality assurance systems to strengthen their cooperation on these objectives. Higher education quality assurance mechanisms should support lifelong learning by a broader European dimension, providing transparency and recognition, better adapting to non-traditional education and learners, and encouraging bridges with other education levels and sectors (in particular with vocational education and training). This should be complemented with incentives for higher education institutions to become more active in lifelong learning, and to involve employers, since employability is one of the main reasons for motivating lifelong learning in many citizens.

CHAPTER 2:

Internal Quality Assurance at Laurea University of Applied Sciences Finland – Integrating Learning and Research

Outi Kallioinen, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland

2.1 Introduction

Laurea University of Applied Sciences⁸, with 8000 students and 500 staff, is among the five biggest universities of applied sciences in Finland. Laurea is located in the heart of Finland's business and cultural life, the area of surrounding capital city Helsinki. Laurea has seven local units in the Helsinki metropolitan region, profiled to anticipate and meet the challenges of the rapidly developing working life of its area. The strengths of the seven RDI-oriented regional campuses are the principle of proximity, the ability to identify the surrounding area's local and regional development possibilities, the ability to conduct practical applied research, and the ability to link staff and students to RDI activities.

Laurea's operations are strategically steered with a core strategy for 2010–2015 and three main strategies: Pedagogical Strategy (2011), Regional Development Strategy (2005, being updated at the moment) and Research and Development Strategy (2011) approved by the Laurea Board of Directors. Internationalisation objectives are also set in the Programme for International Activities for 2009–2012.

Laurea's strategic intent for 2015 is to be an internationally recognised higher education institution of future competence and metropolitan development.

Future competence comprises specialisation in service innovation and value networks, an operating model (LbD) which integrates learning and RDI and promotes workplace development, as well as internationally recognised and productive R&D. Laurea's strategic choice is to firmly integrate its three main tasks which the three main strategies apply (pedagogical, R&D, regional development). Student centred RDI integrated with learning is established on the Learning by Developing (LbD) model, which forms the core for Laurea's pedagogical thinking (Pedagogical Strategy 2011). The results and effectiveness are evaluated against the objectives of Laurea's Strategy Implementation Plan. The Quality Assurance system is based on the Strategy Implementation Plan with critical success factors and criteria.

Laurea's profile can be found in:

- a. Service innovations and value networks;
- b. Internationally acknowledged and productive RDI activity;
- c. Learning by Developing – integrating RDI and learning.

Laurea's strategic focal areas are:

- Service business;
- Expertise in nursing and coping at home;

- Security and social responsibility;
- Student entrepreneurship.

Laurea's strategic choices are:

- Learning by Developing: Generating future competence and service Innovations and promoting student and growth entrepreneurship;
- Developing the Greater Helsinki Metropolitan Area;
- Internationally recognised, productive RDI.
(Laurea strategy 2010–2015.)

2.2 Learning by Developing (LbD) - a pedagogical innovation at Laurea

The pedagogical framework for learning in Laurea, developed bottom-up by the staff, is called Learning by Developing (LbD) which is based on five dimensions: authenticity, partnership, experiential learning, research and creativity. In this model, the focus is on integrating RDI and teaching in the same process and curriculum delivery.

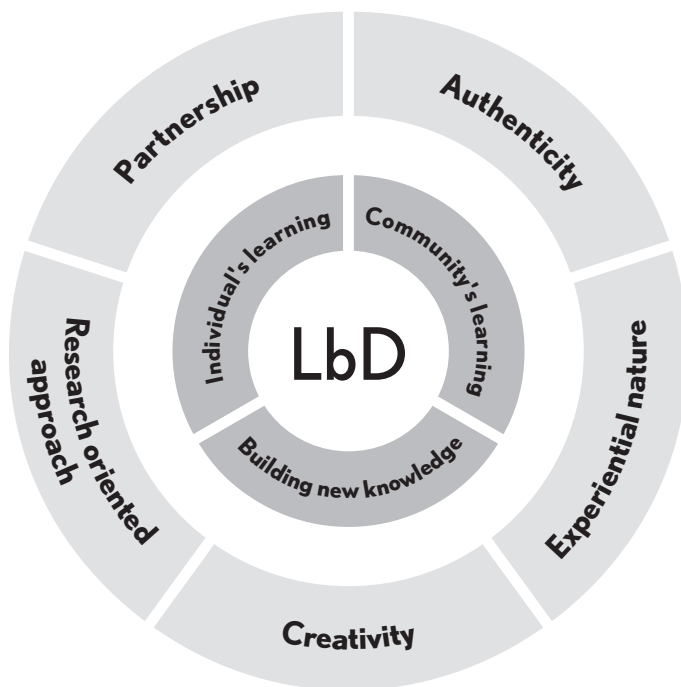


Figure 1. Learning by Developing (LbD) model at Laurea

Students' learning is related to development projects that are genuinely rooted in the working world and the students are involved in these projects from the beginning of their studies. According to Laurea's pedagogical strategy students are treated as junior colleagues. This places lecturers in an entirely new situation which creates challenges for pedagogical leadership.

At Laurea, the development projects are authentic, working life-based, processual and applied by nature. They are applied in a sense that during the project new, community-based knowledge is produced and problems and challenges solved. The sole purpose of the development project is not to apply strictly scientific knowledge as such to a practical situation. In the best cases new models, new working life culture, new products, new methods and new knowledge are produced in the networked process.

The focus on students and customers means placing students at the centre of all operations, as they are one of Laurea's most important stakeholders. Labour market representatives and other stakeholders play an active and important role in generating new competence and in shared learning. The importance of customer orientation is emphasised further in the LbD model's mutual processes. In the LbD-model regional competence and knowledge, networks and diverse partnerships are integrated comprehensively into the learning process and studies so that students have the possibility to become development-oriented experts in their fields. (Pedagogical strategy 2011.)

The LbD-model is being constantly developed and it has also been evaluated by an international evaluation team (see more in the report *Making a Difference by Vyakarnam, S. et al 2008*). The International LbD follow-up evaluation took place in 2009 and the Quality Teaching Review by OECD/IMHE in 2010.

In the past years, the LbD model has seen a clear shift from the strong pedagogical orientation of its early days to stronger establishment on RDI. The development corresponds to the requirements of both European and Finnish higher education institutions and innovation policies.

2.3 Development of perspective – planning, implementation, evaluation and development of Laurea's activities

Quality management is part of the continuous development of Laurea's operations and is linked to all Laurea's operations as different monitoring and development measures. Therefore, it is part of the management, strategic work and internal result-oriented management of the organisation. All people working and studying at Laurea and the most important stakeholders participate in quality improvement.

Continuous development serves as the basis for Laurea's quality system and the quality work activities according to it. Continuous development consists of four phases: Plan – Do – Check – Act. Continuous development can be seen as a spiral or an endless process. Its different stages do not always linearly follow each other. (Quality Handbook 2011.)

Laurea monitors and improves quality using a quality assurance system which is built on the Strategy Implementation Plan and its critical success factors. The aim of the system is to systematically produce quality-related data, make Laurea's functions visible and produce materials for developing operations and processes. The quality assurance system provides a general view of the links between the different elements of quality development, and identifies the responsibilities of various parties. The system is used to harmonise and increase the efficiency of operations. It provides the context for systematising functions, although allowing for unit-specific solutions.

The quality assurance system is a summary of the organisation's operating methods. The quality system is evaluated in relation to how well it fulfils the customers' demands and how systematically it is applied. The quality handbook is a detailed description

of the quality assurance system. The quality system refers to the entity formed by the quality assurance structure and organisation, responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources. Laurea develops the quality of its operations using strategic, pedagogic and competence management and evaluation methods, operating models and tools. Evaluation and development of the quality control system are also carried out and supported by a unit-specific quality assurance system establishment and participation practices, self-evaluations, quality training and quality-related communication.

Quality enhancement is one of the core tasks in pedagogical leadership. Pedagogical leadership of local units adheres to Laurea's uniform leadership model, in which the unit leader is responsible for the unit's cost efficiency, productivity and innovativeness. Leadership principles particularly include networking, vision for activities, and promotion of cooperation and implementation of the principles of shared leadership in the expert organisation. Openness and transparency, creativity and profitability are emphasised in activities. Practice-based innovations produce new, creative and dynamic solutions and added value for activities.

Student centred RDI that is integrated in learning steers the planning, implementation, evaluation and development of activities. Work time plans include time for development for the whole personnel. The curriculum is arranged into longer term study sessions instead of divided traditionally into lessons. Working methods, partnerships and development targets described in the study implementation plans are defined independently by staff and together with students. Integrated operations are evaluated and developed through study unit implementation plans, student feedback and self evaluation.

Learning by Developing – LbD-model and its evaluations and development commit teachers to develop their own activities according to Laurea's objectives. The use of teaching evaluation data to develop operations has become an essential part of Laurea's operating culture. The extensive student feedback system is also widely developed. Research and development work has been evaluated as a part of LbD-model as well.



Figure 2. Laurea's Quality System: Plan, Do, Check, Act

The quality circle Plan-Do-Check-Act initiates from values and strategic intent as well as from the strategies derived from them. The phases of the circle are as follows: Laurea's operating environment, the basis for operational planning (Plan), the operations and processes (Do), the monitoring and assessment targets (Check) and the methods, procedures and tools used to develop the operations (Act).

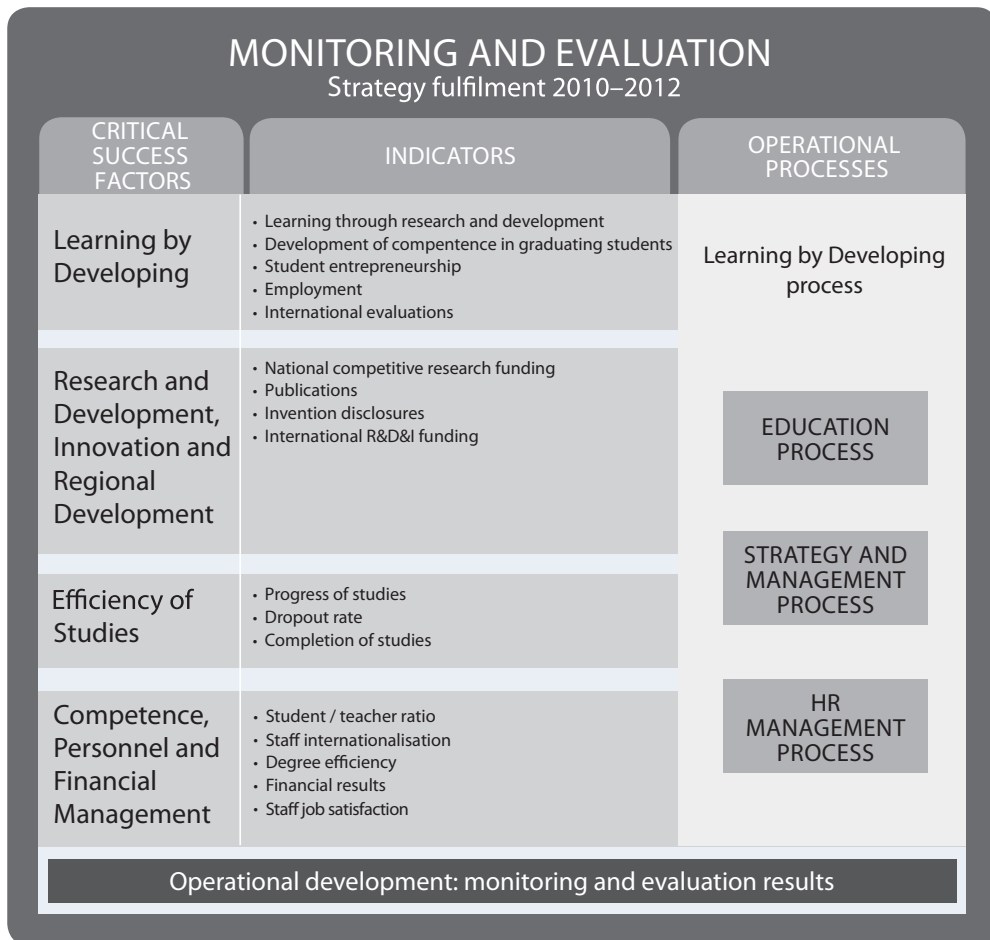


Figure 3. Monitoring and Evaluation of the activities

Laurea defines the success factors for a specific period. The factors can be considered key to the fulfilment of strategies and strategic intent. Indicators and target levels are set for these critical success factors. Extents of Critical success factors: Learning by Developing, research and development, innovation activity and regional development, effectiveness of studies and knowledge of personnel and financial management are presented in Laurea's strategy 2010–2015. Critical success factors are evaluated every year.

2.4 Results of the FINHEEC audit at Laurea in 2010

Laurea's Quality Assurance System was audited by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) on October 2010, and Laurea passed the audit successfully. Quality system of the Laurea meets the criteria **DEVELOPING**.

FINHEEC is an independent expert body assisting universities, universities of applied sciences, and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters related to evaluation, and thus contributes to improving the quality of higher education. The FINHEEC board members are elected for terms and they represent universities,

universities of applied sciences, students and the working world. In this section, I will first introduce the strengths of Laurea's Quality Assurance system and then present the recommendations by FINHEEC.

“The audit group states that as a result of long-term efforts, the strengths of Laurea's QA system are its comprehensiveness, accessibility, transparency and extensive implementation. The objectives, including the sub-objectives, functions, actors and responsibilities of the quality assurance system are defined and documented in a clear manner. The system is very well organised and effective and promotes quality assurance. The utilisation of information produced by various evaluations in developing the activities has become an integral part of Laurea's operating culture. The staff are committed and motivated to participate in evaluations and to utilise the information obtained through them. Learning by Developing (LbD) has been adopted as a framework which combines the three basic tasks and the teaching staff are highly committed to it. The strategy, values and QA system steer the goal-oriented operations and support creative development activities. The management is committed to the development of the activities and the QA system of the higher education institute. Thanks to the communal operating culture and effective QA system, the local units have been entrusted with extensive freedom and responsibility. The QA system is a tool used by Laurea's entire staff and forms part of their everyday activities. Strong societal interaction and regular external evaluations help Laurea steer its activities towards strategically important areas. The audit group identified the implementation of the maintenance manual and service descriptions as well as the active tradition of development days as Laurea's best practices.” (Lampelo et al 2010, 84.)

The audit team presented the following development recommendations to the Laurea University of Applied Sciences:

- “The Ministry of Education and Culture's performance indicators are included as critical success factors, and especially as their indicators. From the perspective of developing the activities, it might be appropriate to break down the higher education institute's objectives into more concrete sub-objectives and to create more detailed indicators for their monitoring.
- The amount of information included in the QA system is extensive and it is still located in a number of different places. It is recommended that the information be reorganised to be more user friendly and informative. To serve the further development of the QA system's usability, information could be collated and grouped according to user profiles. This would speed up access to the information required.
- The quality assurance of the guidance on the LbD method still requires further development. The system does not search or identify information that would describe guidance activities or learning processes. The development of the LbD method is advanced but in the future, the focus should be placed on developing practical teaching and guidance work in which the method is applied.
- The evaluation of learning and the development of evaluation have fallen behind the development of teaching based on the LbD method and is methodologically teacher-centred. In terms of the objectives set for feedback, evaluation and self-evaluation practices regarding learning and competences, the QA system should be further developed so that it produces more information on the achievement of the objectives set in the pedagogical strategy.

- The audit group recommends that the student feedback system, which in itself is comprehensive, be further developed so that questions on the content and the timing of feedback collection better follow the rhythm of studies. The procedures for responding to feedback and the development of a channel for anonymous written feedback should be paid attention to in the future.
- The documentation of stakeholder feedback is not systematic and neither its utilisation nor a development plan for it has been systematically documented. The audit group recommends that the processing of stakeholder feedback be made more systematic as a whole.
- The evaluation group recommends that the monitoring of the effectiveness of the QA system be made more systematic, and likewise, the achieved impact be more systematically communicated. A good starting point for this is the recently created quality guarantee and the maintenance manual practices.” (Lampelo et al 2008, 84.)

2.5 Conclusion

Laurea has developed its quality system during more than ten years. The quality system is therefore deeply rooted in Laurea’s integrative pedagogical model. The recent audit results were of great benefit for Laurea as they strengthened also our own views of the good and weak areas in the system.

As the strategic focus on development is now placed on quality teaching, it is a true challenge for the entire Laurea staff to further improve the quality of teaching and to develop higher education pedagogy in order to produce competent experts for the working world in various fields, and to enhance regional development. These challenges make the mutually defined quality work and the entire staff commitment to it crucial.

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www.laurea.fi

CHAPTER 3:

Quality Assurance for non-degree programmes

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3.1 Introduction

Over recent decades, lifelong learning has attracted a lot of attention and is a concept that has increasingly found its way into many education policy demands. Quality assurance in the field of universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) is one of the objectives that accreditation agencies all have been dealing with for many years. Therefore, Lifelong Learning and Quality Assurance are closely related to each other.

This paper will provide an overview of Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning by first pointing out the development and importance of lifelong learning, as well as the challenges involved. In addition, there will be a short description of FIBAA's approach of quality assurance and its underlying certification process for continuing training and professional development courses. Future perspectives of Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning will be the final part of the underlying paper.

FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation) is an international quality assurance agency – a non-profit foundation established in 1994 specifically to promote quality and transparency in education and science by awarding a Quality Seal to education programmes and providers operating in tertiary and quaternary fields. FIBAA achieves its objectives, in particular, by developing suitable measures and instruments which serve to define quality guidelines for the respective academic goals which educational offerings and institutions pursue. Furthermore, it creates relevant decision-making bodies to accredit, audit, evaluate and certify educational programmes and their providers in the international field. FIBAA also contributes proactively to the work of international bodies and beyond in order to attain the comparability of quality standards and quality assurance processes in the educational sector.

3.2. Lifelong Learning

3.2.1. DEVELOPMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

It was as early as in 2003 when the European Commission, in a memorandum on lifelong learning, specified that learning opportunities should be made available to each and every EU citizen at any time and permanently. In practical terms, this means that each and every EU citizen must and can embark on their own individual development paths in line with their respective needs and requirements at any time in their life.

In this sense, the European Council created a programme in 2006 which, through lifelong learning, contributes to enabling the European Union to develop into a progressive and forward-looking knowledge society – into a society with sustainable development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Today, this ambitious programme provides an umbrella for education and mobility programmes, such as ERASMUS and LEONARDO, which already existed at an earlier stage.

The European Council confirmed this approach to lifelong learning once more in 2009. The Council is unanimous with regard to the fact that European collaboration in the field of general and professional education and training must have been established in a strategic context by 2020 at the latest, which encompasses the general and professional education and training systems as a whole from the perspective of lifelong learning. Consequently, this would mean that lifelong learning would indeed have to be seen as a fundamental principle that should cover each and every kind of learning – formal, non-formal or informal – at all levels, from education in early childhood and school education via higher education and vocational training through to adult education.

3.2.2. CHALLENGES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The demographics (with an ageing social structure and lower birth rates), the employment market and the types of available work have seen and undergone dramatic change. For this reason, Lifelong Learning has become important to our society.

The new demographics include fewer young students, balanced out by ever more older people. The post-retirement years have brought the retired into the focus of attention, and also into the agenda of the universities. At the same time, the pressure on public budgets has become greater. Demographic change seems to cast doubts on today's social conditions, and on the economic efficiency of higher education.

Lifelong Learning has become important to our society. The growing number of “knowledge workers”, the loss of reassurances, the loss of familiar working structures and whole employment sectors, and the development of new employment contracts and forms of employment call for lifelong learning to be efficient and practicable. This challenge extends far beyond the economic field.

3.3. Quality assurance

3.3.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LIFELONG LEARNING

A particular and strategic objective of the European Union's programme for lifelong learning includes improving the quality, appeal and accessibility of the lifelong learning programmes available in the Member States. This provides a direct link to quality assurance in lifelong learning.

Efficient, fair and high-quality general and professional education systems should play a decisive role in Europe's success and in improving employability. An outstanding point involves improving the administration and management of educational and training institutions, and developing effective quality assurance systems. High quality can, according to the European Council, only be achieved by making efficient and sustainable use of public and, possibly, private resources, and by promoting facts-based methods and procedures in the field of general and professional education.

The accreditation system plays an important role in terms of quality assurance. The accreditation of degree programmes is an internationally-established quality assurance process in the higher education sector. It serves to maintain fundamental standards in terms of the contentual and structural design of educational offerings, to secure the comparability of various study programmes at national and international level, and to facilitate the international recognition of academic achievements and degrees. Therefore, FIBAA developed its own approach to external quality assurance in Lifelong Learning.

3.3.2. CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The core of FIBAA's external quality assurance is its underlying certification process. It was specially developed to promote and secure the quality of continuing training and professional development courses which do not lead to an academic degree (non-degree programmes). FIBAA Certification makes it possible to subject these educational programmes to a special form of quality control, thus ensuring their academic level. The certification process targets universities and higher education institutions that are aiming to position their continuing training, postgraduate and professional development courses within the system of international academic quality standards. Furthermore, it supports transparency inside this relatively new education market.

For Certifications, FIBAA draws on its many years of experience when considering the special features of accrediting postgraduate Master's degree programmes. These features include the consideration of professional and career experience in a degree programme's content, particular requirements in terms of the Structure and Organisation of career-linked degree programmes as well as didactical standards for teaching staff to meet. A successfully-completed Certification Process gives universities the opportunity to raise the benefit of their academic continuing training offerings by providing better opportunities for gaining credits. The advantage for graduates who have completed a certified non-degree programme also lies in the fact that acquired credit points can be credited to degree programmes.

To support the HEIs in their certification process, FIBAA has developed an Assessment Guide which includes some 40 quality criteria in the form of questions and definitions concerning the benchmarks. Each of the quality criteria are aligned with the special features of continuing training and professional development courses such as the participants' professional experience, the qualifications of the teaching staff, greater independence of the continuing training courses and special admissions rules. This serves as a basis for the HEIs when producing their self-documentation file.

The non-degree programmes have to meet the requirements of the Bologna Process as a matter of principle (modularisation etc.) and the European Qualifications Framework (usually levels 5 to 8) to ensure that acquired credit points can be credited to degree programmes or the process can be simplified in order to guarantee the international comparability of these achievements.

The challenges of the first FIBAA Certification Processes were the orientation towards the target group with open access to the non-degree programmes, the particularly high requirements regarding the didactical competences of the teaching staff and the positioning of the non-degree programmes within the European Qualifications Framework. At the end of the process, FIBAA awards a Quality Seal in recognition of the successful completion of a Certification Process, thereby documenting the high quality and academic level of the duly assessed academic non-degree programme.

3.4 Future perspectives and challenges

With the goal of delivering professional and practical competence, we now have to establish methods and procedures to deliver a clear and transparent structure, so that transparency and the associated trust and confidence can be created in the education market, as well as in lifelong learning.

Learners wish to decide for themselves which learning programme they choose, specifically tailor-made to meet the requirements in their specific circumstances or situations. Based on this, they would seek an employer who would encourage them to make a long-term, strategic decision on how they wish to progress through life.

Employers want to employ certain staff members, namely those who have the corresponding education, training and motivation required for the given path. Employers also want to choose the educational facility that would provide the high standards that are needed.

Educational facilities, on the other hand, seek to be more open in order to deliver the best possible range of learning programmes, and to establish and strategically expand its long-term curriculum.

Given this new development, therefore, it is important to take into account the fact that the number of stakeholders has widened. Students and institutions of higher education should be provided with useful information and transparency. The stakeholders of today increasingly include employers and staff, as well as public and political institutions.

To enforce the process of lifelong learning, there will be a need to make the European public aware of the importance of lifelong learning and to foster better cooperation between traditional academic and the relatively new structures of non-degree programmes and the business community. Helping to establish a European area of education and training through academic and vocational recognition of qualifications within the European Union, and stressing the educational efforts to attain equality of opportunities are important steps towards the development of sustainable lifelong learning processes.

CHAPTER 4:

Lifelong Learning and European Higher Education Institutions – the FLLLEX Project

Richard Thorn, Institutes of Technology, Ireland and Klaas Vansteenhuyse, Leuven University College, Belgium

4.1 The EU and LLL Participation

Within the EU, the origins of current lifelong learning policy are found in the *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness, and Employment: The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century* (CEC, 1993) (in Riddell et al, 2007). It is this underpinning policy that contextualises most, if not all of the developments that have taken place in the EU since then. Lifelong learning policy development has been inextricably linked with population and labour market trends. A detailed description of this aspect of lifelong learning is beyond the scope of this paper. However, Eurostat (2008, 2009a and b) provide a detailed analysis of this aspect. In this paper, we are concerned with the measure of participation in lifelong learning offered by Eurostat which may be set against the current EU benchmarks for education generally and lifelong learning specifically. The benchmarks to be achieved by 2020 are:

1. At least 95% of children between the age of 4 and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
2. The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%;
3. The share of 30–34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%;
4. An average of at least 15% of adults (age group 25–64) should participate in LLL.

It should be noted that the participation by adults for the 10 years to 2010 was to have been 12.5%.

The benchmarks set by the EU in relation to participation rates of adults in lifelong learning are based on figures from the Eurostat/Labour Force Survey (LFS). In the Labour Force Survey, participation in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25–64 who stated that they received education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer to the question ‘participation to education and training’. Both the numerator and the denominator come from the LFS.

The data on participation show that in 2008, 9.5% of Europeans aged 25–64 participated in education and training in the 4 weeks prior to the survey, with high skilled adults being five times more likely to participate than low-skilled. These data show that while some progress was made in increasing adult participation in education and training, not enough was made to reach the EU 2010 benchmark of 12.5% to be reached by 2010. New benchmarks were adopted in May 2009 as part of the 2020

Education and Training Framework with a target of 15% of the population aged 25–64 to participate in lifelong learning (see above).

Large differences in participation between Member States may be noted in the LFS. The UK and Finland are among the best performers reaching participation rates of 20–30% in 2008. The Netherlands is among the next group with a participation rate of 17%. France and Ireland achieved participation rates of 7.3% and 7.1% respectively, whereas Belgium, Lithuania and Portugal are at 6.8% 5.3% and 4.9% respectively. Little or no progress was recorded in Turkey with a participation rate of 1.8% in 2008 (CEC, 2009). The information collected in the LFS relates to all education or training whether or not relevant to the respondents' current or possible future job.

Beyond the scope of this short paper it is important to note that other data sources (e.g. OECD and Eurydice) also show similar patterns of non-participation.

4.2 The Part Time Learner Experience

It is clear that at a European level lifelong learning is, at best, patchily developed at a system level. What then of the experience of those who undertake lifelong learning within the EU? Unfortunately, no systematic study of the experiences of part time learners has been undertaken. However, work undertaken by one of the authors (Thorn et al, 2010) offers perspectives on the attitude of adults to lifelong learning while a significant study by Williams and Kane (2010), utilising a large database of student surveys in the UK, gives insights into the experiences of part time learners in that country.

Thorn et al (2010) undertook a detailed market analysis of adults and their attitudes to lifelong learning including potential barriers to participation. Amongst the findings were: people's concern is for their jobs and their career prospects, not their 'lifelong learning'; learning is seen as a tool – a means to an end, in fact there is little enthusiasm for the idea of lifelong learning. However, most are positive about the need to further their learning and qualifications, and most see it as important in order to get in position when the economy picks up. Again, others are disillusioned and see no point in investing in further learning if there are no jobs; people in their 30s and 40s feel at a disadvantage to young college leavers.

A key aspect of the findings from Thorn et al (2010) was the identification of a range of barriers, both real and perceived, that exist and that act as disincentives to adults taking up lifelong learning. Intriguingly, these include, but are not restricted to, discomfort with the idea of 'going back' to college (seen as a regressive step), the concept of lifelong learning (seems like a sentence) given that their concern is with keeping up to date professionally rather than their 'lifelong learning', whether they will get a return on their investment and whether or not will they be able to manage the time commitment.

These findings clearly indicate that in efforts to increase the participation by adults in lifelong learning, it is not sufficient to address system level issues but also to address the concerns and cares of individuals.

As noted above, there has been no systematic study of the experience of part time learners across Europe. However, the study undertaken by Williams and Kane (2010) in the UK documents the experience of part time learners from national student survey records over a period of 11 years. Williams and Kane note that for part time learners managing their work life balance, obtaining timely feedback, getting access

to library and catering facilities and concerns about finance are all issues that give cause for concern. Interestingly, psychological issues concerned with identity and marginalisation arise. “Part time students are often forgotten about”, “the part time course is an afterthought just a scaled down...” and a perception amongst some part time students that they are recruited primarily to raise money for the institution.

Clearly, if European states are to successfully address the challenge of increasing participation in lifelong learning, then the perceptions and experiences of adults in respect of lifelong learning must be dealt with in policy initiatives.

4.3 The FLLLEX Project

It is against the backdrop of patchy performance in participation in lifelong learning and often negative feelings and attitudes amongst adults towards lifelong learning and their experiences of lifelong learning that the FLLLEX project was initiated.

The FLLLEX project started in January 2010 and will run until the end of August 2012. The overall aim of the project is to consider the link between lifelong learning strategy and implementation and professional higher education. Five specific objectives exist for the project as follows:

- How flexible are HEI’s when it comes to Lifelong Learning? Hence: FLLLEX.
- What is the impact of LLL on the organisation?
- What institutional changes are required for the future?
- What strategy advice can the project propose to HEI’s?
- What policy advice to European and national players?

There are nine work packages divided amongst 24 partners from 10 European countries. The work packages cover:

- Policy and performance
- Stakeholder expectations
- Self assessment tool
- Tool implementation and review
- Good policy and practise guidelines

To date, work has been completed on Work Package 1 which considered the lifelong learning policy framework within which higher education institutions in Europe operate. A key output from this work package has been the development of a matrix showing the intensity of lifelong learning policy implementation in Europe and its correlation with the participation rates (see Figure 1 below).

CHARACTERISTICS	COUNTRIES							
	Ireland	Belgium	Lithuania	Scotland	Turkey	Finland	Netherlands	France
Legal framework /legislation	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Participation rates	2	3	3	1	3	1	1	3
Funding and investment	3	2	3	1	3	1	1	2
Flexibility and access to learning pathways	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	3
Link between education and work	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	2
Transparency of qualification system	1	2	2	1	3	1	1	2
Public awareness and perception of lifelong learning	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Link with wider EU developments	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2
Involvement and support of key stakeholders	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	2
Information and guidance for learners and potential learners	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Recognition of all forms of learning	2	1	3	1	3	2	2	1
Cost of Education – support/initiatives	3	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
EU Benchmark for LLL (2010=12.5%; 2020=15%)	7.1%	6.8%	4.9%	19.9%	1.8%	23.1%	17.0%	5.58%

Figure 1 : Comparative Matrix for Intensity of Lifelong Learning Policy Implementation in FLLLEX Countries

The matrix shows clearly that countries such as Finland which have high levels of participation in lifelong learning demonstrate significant levels of policy implementation intensity across all policy areas. In contrast, notwithstanding the presence of strongly implemented policy across most areas, Ireland, which has relatively low participation levels, does not have a strongly implemented funding regime to support lifelong learning. The other main output from this work package was the development of a series of ‘policy hooks’ that could be used by individual institutions in the development of lifelong learning strategies.

The work in the remaining work packages is ongoing at the time of preparing this paper and involves surveys of students, providers and employers and the development of a self evaluation questionnaire that will be trialed in a small number of higher education institutions. Initial survey results show that short courses, lack of employer support, lack of clarity about the differences between formal and non-formal learning, information deficits between higher education institutions and businesses all feature in the results to date.

The reader is referred to the project website www.fllex.eu for further project details.

4.4 Conclusions

European states have, at best a patchy record in participation in lifelong learning. Likewise, the experience of adults thinking about or involved in lifelong learning is mixed. The FLLLEX project is endeavoring to help develop tools that will assist institutions in formulating lifelong learning strategies.

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Conclusions

The notion of Lifelong Learning (LLL) is based on the idea that all people should have the opportunity to continuously improve and develop their knowledge, skills and competences. In light of the present articles, we can conclude that Lifelong Learning is an essential notion in this decade's employment market with socio-economical and professional impacts.

To date, European states have an averagely low participation in lifelong learning. This, naturally, varies considerably between different European countries. Survey results show that there is a serious lack of information about available short courses and learning programmes, and a lack of clarity about the differences between formal and non-formal learning programmes. Worryingly, the survey results reveal a lack of employer support as well. It is therefore crucial to develop tools that will assist higher education institutions in formulating lifelong learning strategies. It is important to involve employers in the development of these strategies, since employability is one of the main reasons for motivating lifelong learning in many citizens. For quality assurance mechanisms should thus be flexible to ensure that non-traditional lifelong learning initiatives fulfil their objectives.

One of the articles reveals that the European Union has a vision for Europe's future social market economy, with a strong focus on skills and lifelong learning. According to this vision, the EU can be turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion, with the help of efficient cooperation between stakeholders from all levels and sectors, public or private, relevant for lifelong learning. Cooperation should be particularly efficient and sustainable between education and training, employment and social affairs, and across national, regional and local levels.

Another article points out that continuous development and quality enhancement should be a core task in each pedagogical leadership to produce competent experts for the working world in various fields, and to enhance regional development. It is important to emphasise here that continuous development is an endless process at all levels. It is vital for institutions to systematically produce quality-related data, to prove the transparency of their functions, and to harmonise their operations.

For the European states to successfully address the challenge of enforcing the process of lifelong learning, the European public should be made aware of the importance of lifelong learning through policy initiatives. European states should also foster better cooperation between traditional institutions and the relatively new structures of non-degree programmes, not to forget the employment market.

To conclude, Lifelong Learning should become an inviting and fulfilling path that people independently seek, and happily take. Not least, with a common goal of more competent and motivated employees in mind, encouraging Lifelong Learning should be included in every employer's agenda.

Annex I

ENQA Workshop on Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning

Hosted by FIBAA

Bonn, 16–17 May 2011

VENUE

University Club Bonn

Konviktstraße 9

53113 Bonn

PROGRAMME

Moderator: **Professor Dr. Thomas Heimer**, University of Applied Sciences Rhein Main, Chairperson of the FIBAA-Accreditation Commission

Monday, 16 May 2011

- 12.00 a.m. Registration and welcome lunch buffet
- 2.00 p.m. **Welcome Speech**
Daisuke Motoki, Managing Director of FIBAA
- 2.15 p.m. **Introductory Words**
Dr. Achim Hopbach, ENQA President
- 2.30 p.m. Keynote Speech
LLL Objectives and Challenges
Dr. Endika Bengoetxea,
European Commission, DG Education and Culture
- 3.10 p.m. **Employers' Perspective**
Michael Donat, Director Human Resources, Bearing Point
- ca. 3.50 p.m. Coffee Break
- 4.30 p.m. **FLLLEX Project – LLL Incorporation into European HEI**
Dr. Richard Thorn, Institute of Technology Ireland, Director,
Flexible Learning and Research
- 5.15 p.m. **Quality Criteria of Scientific Continuing Education.**
A joint project of Leuphana University Lüneburg, Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA)
Prof. Dr. Sabine Remdisch and Milan Uhe,
Leuphana University Lüneburg
- ca. 6.30 p.m. Sightseeing
- 7.30 p.m. Dinner at Hotel Pastis Restaurant

Tuesday, 17 May 2011

GOOD PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE OF LLL

9.00–9.40 a.m. **Internal Quality Assurance at Laurea University of Applied Sciences Finland – Integrating Learning and Research**
Dr. Outi Kallioinen, Vice-President and Development Director

9.40.
 –10.20 a.m. **Programme Accreditation, EVA Denmark**
Christian Moldt, Managing Adviser
Morten Brock, Evaluation Officer

10.20
 –11.00 a.m. **Certification, FIBAA, Germany**
Dr. Immo Schmidt-Jortzig, Head of Sections Programme Accreditation and Certification Procedures

11.00 a.m. Coffee Break

11.30 a.m. **Parallel Round Table Discussions**
 –1.30 p.m.

Round Table 1: Internal QA

Chair: *Brankica Assenmacher*

Specific content related to didactic-methodical and organisational requirements on LLL study programmes; how can the factors like level of previous education, age etc. be considered in the design of the study programme or in the admission criteria?

Round Table 2: External QA

Chair: *Tine Holm*

Quality criteria for the assessment of LLL study programmes

Round Table 3: Transparency of LLL study programmes


Chair: *Josep Grifoll*

Quality assurance as the answer; International dimension;
 Recognition within EHEA

1.30 p.m. Lunch Break

2.30 p.m. **Closing session:**
 Presentation of the Round Tables' Results and Reflections on Seminar Outcomes

ca. 3.30 p.m. End of the Workshop



THIS REPORT is based on the ENQA workshop on the theme “Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning” that was held on 16–17 May 2011, in Bonn, Germany. The workshop provided a platform for discussion and exchange of experiences among the main stakeholders in quality assurance. The workshop aimed to contribute to joint understanding of the quality assurance in Lifelong Learning (LLL) between all stakeholders, to disseminate information on good practice of external quality assurance in LLL, and to discuss standards and procedures for external a quality assurance in LLL.



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