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ERASMUS MUNDUS QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROJECT

QUALITY HANDBOOK: SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2009





Quality Handbook: Summary

The Quality Handbook offers a mechanism to explore, individually or collaboratively, where excellence can be created in an Erasmus Mundus course, or whether a planned course is covering all the key aspects of excellence. The Handbook provides you with examples of good practice and is accompanied by an Online Self-Assessment Tool (available on the Erasmus Mundus Excellence website at www.emqa.eu) which invites you to respond to a set of structured questions relating to the practice on your course. The self-assessment questions are not intended to offer a complete and comprehensive set of practice, but they should allow you to explore where improvement could be prioritised. Both staff and students may assess a course, using a subset of questions that are directed towards the student experience.

Basis of the Handbook: Visits to Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses

The Quality Handbook has been built through a series of visits to 12 Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses - all with nearly five years of experience and selected on a voluntary basis - across 36 partner sites during 2008 and 2009.

The exercise was conducted on the basis of mutual trust and confidentiality, aiming to identify examples of good practice as well as valuable lessons based on experience. Visits were prepared in close consultation with the coordinators and partners of each Masters Course, who were also asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire prior to the visit to their institution. Course teams contributed significant amounts of time, and spoke openly and constructively about the challenges they had experienced when building their courses. The students on the courses also contributed their experiences as "consumers".

"Components of Excellence"

The visiting team looked at a number of issues related to the development of an "excellent" Erasmus Mundus course. These included the quality of structure and processes in the context of pan-European "jointness" (covering areas such as teaching and learning, assessment and the available teaching infrastructure and resources) and quality outcomes and impacts (including the student experience, impacts on research and teaching developments, etc.).

The material gathered as a result of the visits was checked for accuracy and consistency, and each set was then classified against four principal components which have been identified as providing the core framework for quality across Erasmus Mundus courses:

- **Quality of Teaching and Learning (QATL)**
- **Facilities, Logistics and Finance (FLAF)**
- **Quality of Leadership across Institutions (QUIL)**
- **Joined-up Practice and Integration (JUPI)**



Each of these "Components of Excellence" contains a series of sub-components, which are specific actions that courses can undertake to improve their quality.

Quality of Teaching and Learning

The first and most important dimension covers the teaching and learning experience and is called "Quality of Teaching and Learning" (the mnemonic for this is QATL). The curriculum needs to be designed as a coherent set of modules, not just something that is extracted from a range of existing course offerings. The Course objectives and the learning outcomes both need to be articulated, and the way in which the Course is meeting them also needs to be monitored. The ways in which student work is assessed need at least to be coherent (it should be clear to students how work is assessed at each partner site) and ideally consistent (student work should be assessed to the same criteria at all partner sites).

The Course should be subjected to independent and external review, so that the advice from high-reputation international academics can provide pointers to the future development of the Course. The multicultural nature of the student community can be acknowledged by developing a clear set of Course rules and ethical expectations (both socially and academically); students from such diverse backgrounds can also benefit through the provision of opportunities to extend and enrich their learning skills.

Quality of Teaching and Learning - sub-components:

1. Designing an excellent curriculum
2. Communicating course objectives and outcomes
3. Developing student competencies
4. Developing learning skills
5. International learning and working
6. Developing linguistic competencies
7. Managing the teaching and learning environment
8. Research activity and research facilities
9. Consistent teaching practice
10. Entrepreneurship and business skills
11. Internships contributing to student learning
12. Consistent assessment methods
13. Formal course review



Facilities, Logistics and Finance

Secondly, attention needs to be given to "Facilities, Logistics and Finance" (FLAF). In a highly competitive global education marketplace, students with the right competencies need to be attracted and the Course needs to verify that their qualifications are legitimate and are suited to the Course requirements. Having attracted students to apply, their applications need to be treated efficiently and effectively. Communication with the students should serve to keep them informed of the progress of their application.

When offered a place on the Course they should be prepared in advance for the move to Europe, for the culture they will live in and for the academic environment within which they will work. Since the students will move between partner institutions during their studies, the Course will need to maintain efficient and coherent communication with them.

When they graduate from the Course the students become alumni and will be part of a growing community of support and advice back to the consortium running the Course.

Facilities, Logistics and Finance - sub-components:

1. When students apply to your course
2. Verifying student qualifications
3. Preparing students academically prior to arrival
4. When "third-country" students travel to Europe
5. Introducing students to European academic practice
6. When students move between partner institutions
7. Student finances
8. Communicating and consulting with students
9. Benefitting from alumni

Quality of Leadership and Institutions

The third dimension concerns the special set of leadership, management and academic expertise that is needed to build the complex and challenging Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses. This is "Quality of Leadership and Institutions" (QUIL). The Course should attract the highest quality academic staff, because the students coming from abroad are often themselves of the highest calibre.

Excellent staff and an excellent curriculum will attract excellent students, but this cannot be achieved just within an academic departmental framework. The commitment of both the institutions and their senior staff is important. Associated with that, there is the need to show clearly that the Course contributes to the research and teaching strategies of the partners. Lastly, excellent courses will look to the future, both in terms of having plans for the continuity of skills and expertise and to explore options for financial sustainability.



Quality of Leadership and Institutions - sub-components:

1. The highest quality academic team
2. Creating a strong course "brand"
3. Securing and maintaining institutional commitment
4. International teaching and research
5. Continuity and leadership
6. Succession strategies
7. Financial sustainability

Joined-up Practice and Integration

The final dimension, "Joined-up Practice and Integration" (JUPI), is what makes Erasmus Mundus such a powerful international academic brand. Course management processes should show efficiency and integration of practice, rather than just being an amalgam of different practices and procedures across partner sites. The extent to which the partners and institutions work together, coherently, will be a strong determinant of how well the Course is working to meet the objectives of the Bologna Process in terms of furthering cooperation in European higher education.

The selection of students needs the full involvement of all partners, who need to accept that the division of labour is equitable and that it will meet the demands of the curriculum being delivered to the students. Students across the Course should be given opportunities to provide feedback on the Course and to give advice on how the Course can further improve.

Joined-up Practice and Integration - sub-components:

1. Selecting students
2. Consortium information system
3. Policy for course fees
4. Division of labour across the consortium
5. A consortium-wide quality assessment process
6. Managing the consortium
7. Policy for awarding the masters degree



How to use the Handbook

The material in the Quality Handbook can be used alongside the Self-Assessment Tool. For each of the four "Components of Excellence" there is a key challenge and a checklist of key actions for consideration. This is then supplemented by examples of practice drawn from the 36 visits made to the 12 Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses.

The phrase "checklist of actions for consideration" is used deliberately, because the Handbook is not intended to be a prescriptive list of actions that you "must undertake". Some of the actions will clearly be more important than others, and some actions will be more relevant to certain higher education institutions and in certain countries.

One of the main lessons drawn so far from the EMQA exercise is that quality is a "journey", not an "absolute". Like any product, there are innovations and new developments, and the overall balance of quality practices may change. For that reason, the online version of the Handbook (available on the Erasmus Mundus Excellence website at www.emqa.eu) has a facility for you to provide information about examples of excellence from your own course which can be considered for future versions of the Handbook.

How to use the Self-Assessment Tool

To assess how your course (existing or planned) is working towards covering all the themes, the online Self-Assessment Tool will help you to build an overall "picture", indicating where your course is strong and helping you identify areas where more attention could be given to building overall excellence. Used together with the Handbook, these quality resources aim to provide you with important contextual material and advice to help you and your partners in your own journey towards excellence.

For those of you who are considering applying for Erasmus Mundus funding, the Handbook and the self-assessment questions can help you build your own checklist of quality actions that you can use when preparing your application.