Sustainable Environment for the Evaluation of Quality in E-Learning

QUALITY GUIDE TO THE NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING PROCESSES

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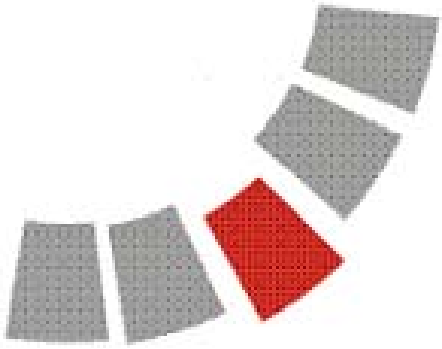

e Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

Certainly much of what is learnt in community centres, in the workplace or by individual study is very far from formalised and documented processes that are found in Total Quality Management approaches. However these processes are generating and providing learning that should not be excluded by the recognition and certification schemes or considered less important than the learning, that takes place in formal settings.

- Are Total Quality Management approaches incompatible with informal and non formal learning?
- Is it possible -and if yes, to what extent- to introduce Total Quality Management principles in informal and non-formal learning?
- Which benefits the introduction of quality approach can bring to informal and non formal learning?
- Going beyond the static distinction of formal, non formal and informal learning, how can these three formats dialogue and benefit one from the others?

1.1 THE CONTEXT

This guide has been developed within the framework of the SEQUEEL project (Sustainable Environment for the Evaluation of Quality in eLearning) supported by the European Commission within the eLearning action plan.
The main purpose of the SEEQUEL project is to bring together the main actors involved in the development and use of e-learning and to arrive at a common understanding of quality, including the criteria for its assessment in order to provide an overall quality framework for e-learning in Europe. To that end a discussion group on "informal and non formal learning", was created within the Seequel Europen Quality forum.
The discussion group during the forum debate identified the absence of a guide which would be a valuable means for improving the quality of the supply of elearning in non-formal e informal learning sectors.

1.2 WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS GUIDE?

The aims of this guide are to:

- support providers of informal and non-formal learning introduce quality procedures into their services and tools;
- support understanding of the value of learning irrespective of the context (formal, non-formal and informal) where the learning originally took place;
- improve the visibility and recognition of how informal and non-formal learning in a community environment can generate meaningful learning.

As it appears clearly from the above stated aims the guide is focused on introducing and suggesting quality elements in the informal and non-formal learning supply and emphasising the strong relationship between different formats of learning and different contexts of learning in order to support progression and life-long learning attitude and vision.

1.3 WHOM IS THIS GUIDE FOR? (THE TARGET GROUPS)

The guide is specifically addressed to:

- Providers of non formal and informal learning;
- Providers of eLearning services and resources.

In particular, we consider as stakeholders all who are active in the fields of informal and non-formal learning such as:

- Adult Learning centres, both public and private
- ICT, Content and service providers
- Libraries (learning services)
- Museums (didactic services)
- Publishers from the home market
- Broadcasters
- Enterprises
- Cultural organisations
- Voluntary organisations and NGOs
- Guidance Centres
- Clubs and other informal gathering entities
- Trade Unions
- Municipalities
- Certifier and awarding bodies

In addition to the actors active in the territory, this guide should also be of interest to **policy makers** belonging to the different Ministries such as Education, Culture, Employment and Social Affairs.
Finally, the **learner** who is him/herself at the centre of any learning process and that also belongs to different categories of the above mentioned stakeholders, is a potential reader.

1.4 HOW IS THE GUIDE STRUCTURED?

The guide is structured in four main chapters and one Annex:

1. Introduction
2. Some theories and references on TQM and Learning
   This chapter focused on Total Quality management and how it has been seen as part of learning processes.
3. The specificities and properties of informal learning
   The main specificities/peculiarities of the informal learning will be described by pointing out the key features and really typified this learning
4. A tentative approach.
   It represents the core of the guide. Taking into consideration the specificities of informal and non-formal learning and the characteristics of the TQM approaches, in this chapter a set of criteria and tools are presented, which may support the implementation of a TQM system for non-formal and informal learning. In order to emphasise the benefits of introducing quality principles in informal and non-formal learning some examples are included in this chapter.

Annex: eLearning and TQM
Some relevant examples of the application of these approaches in different sectors are presented

Those having substantial experience in the area will probably recognise in this Guide many approaches that they have already encountered. Generally speaking, specific or tailor-made tools for assuring quality in informal and non formal learning sectors are not readily available but the approach to quality, where applied, is normally derived or borrowed from one of the most structured sectors (usually one directly related: e.g. University, VET). Therefore the main interest in this guide can be recognised in its explicit focus and specificity on informal and non-formal learning.

1.5 HOW TO USE IT?

This guide has been designed to be used in a number of ways: its structure does not require the sequential use of the guide; on the contrary, it allows some parts to be read independently from the others.
Nevertheless, we would suggest that people who are just starting to discover their path in the fields of TQM within informal-non formal learning move through the guide in a sequential and linear manner and before reading the Chapter Three they should take a look to the Anne "eLearning and TQM"

2. SOME THEORIES AND REFERENCES ON TQM AND LEARNING

2.1 THE MAIN APPROACH TO TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Quality in learning has been a central issue for researchers for some time now. The main idea has been to apply already existing quality assessment tools for learning situations. Different models and theories have been restructured to be more suitable for learning evaluation. In this section the main target is to concentrate on total quality management and how it has been seen as part of learning processes. The main idea is to show how TQM is seen in situations, when learning is defined as either informal or non-formal. The structure is to first describe some ideas of TQM in learning. Then to move to informal and non-formal learning and at the end draws the guidelines for how to manage similar situations.

2.2 TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN LEARNING

Total quality management is aimed at continuous improvement. According to Dolmans, Wolfhagen and Scherpbier (2003) this can be achieved only when three conditions are fully met. These three conditions of evaluation are (1) *systematic* (=implies that quality assurance is related to all educational aspects and that all stakeholders are systematically involved), (2) *structural* (=implies that evaluations are carried out at regular intervals with proper frequency and not on *ad hoc* basis and that standards are defined against which data can be compared and judged) and (3) *integrated* (=implies that responsibilities are clearly defined, that quality assurance is an integral part of the organisation's regular work patterns and that quality assurance activities are coherent (Dolmans, Wolfhagen & Scherpbier 2003, 211). Only when these previous mentioned statements are fulfilled the term quality assurance can be replaced with total quality management (Dolmans, Wolfhagen & Scherpbier 2003, 211). Picture of the model is describes the characteristics more detailed (below).

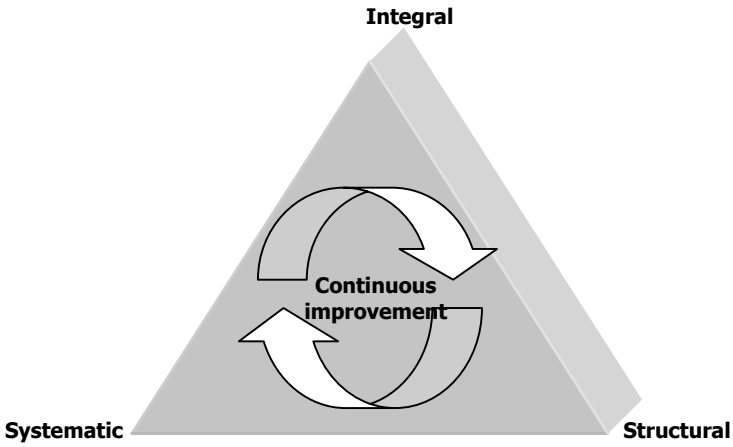


Figure 1.
Three characteristics of quality assurance to ensure continuous improvement (Dolmans, Wolfhagen & Scherpbier 2003, 212)

All models that are created in order to model TQM processes in learning clearly subscribe to the ”transformative” approach to quality with an emphasis on “enhancing participants”(Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2002, 219). From a quality assurance point of view these different models should provide a rich range of elements for identifying evidence for performance. (Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2002, 219.) However, TQM it self concentrates process control of the service and monitoring of its fitness for purpose. Transformative processes on the other hand inherently concerns itself with the changes in the cognitive and affective domains of the learners. The idea is with transformative process learning to make a long lasting impact after any formal programme. (Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2002, 220.)

Haworth and Conrad (1997, p.xii)[1] have developed one model of describing TQM. They call it “engagement theory” where the “central idea (is) student, faculty (academics) and administrative engagement in teaching and learning”. Based on the interviews they made the definition they found for, the teachers point of view, “high quality programs” were the kinds of that contribute students´ earlier learning experiences and support in positive way their growth and development. The theory can be defined with five different clusters of programme attributes:

1. Diverse and engaged participants: faculty (academics), students and learners.
2. Participatory cultures: shared programme direction, community of learners and risk-taking environments.
3. Interactive teaching and learning: critical dialogue, integrative learning, mentoring, co-operative peer learning and out of class activities.
4. Connected programme requirements: planned breadth and depth of coursework, professional residency and tangible product.
5. Adequate resources: support for students, faculty and basic infrastructure. (Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2002, 217.)

In learning the quality issues are not usually evaluated through TQM methods. The reason for this lies in quality management in education (QME). Where TQM concentrates mainly on the areas of the service, QME is based on the educational areas. These models differ from their distinctiveness of emphasis. TQM addresses the service areas with the focus on the products of delivery by measuring, monitoring and continuously improving the processes. QME focuses on the empowerment of the course team across all the boundaries to facilitate dialogue centred on learning. (Srikanthan & Dalrymple 2002, 221.)

Many of the TQM implementation problems may occur in attempting to have the correct understanding of the conditions of satisfaction. This understanding may as well be the customers’ requirements as the learners need for new knowledge. The central issue is to be sure about the needs and the expectations that the learner has. (Dervitsiotis 2001, 695.) Where as customer satisfaction is important in industry TQM, it is important as well in learning.

[1] In **Srikanthan, G. & Dalrymple, J.F. 2002.** Developing a Holistic Model for Quality in Higher Education. *Quality in Higher Education, Vol. 8, No. 3. pp. 217*

More importantly, (higher) learning serves several constituencies, including students, employers, parents, alumni, faculty, taxpayers, supporters, governing boards, administrators, staff, research users and society as whole. (Willis & Taylor 1999, 998). Students are consumers of education, teachers are the decision makers of how teaching is going to be done, alumni can judge the relevance of the educational programme against their professional activities and policy makers makes the decisions about education, how to manage and organize the curriculum (Dolmans, Wolfhagen & Scherpbier 2003, 214). According of these previously mentioned groups it can be seen that all areas of learning (lifelong learning) are important.

Total Quality Management is as mentioned usually seen as part of organisational development processes. Learning in an organisation cannot be applied to systems working in a university situation. At least not by taken for granted. The reason lies mainly in the personal processes of learning in an organisation. An important notification here is that although it is usually spoken about learning organisations it is not the organisations that are learning; it is those learning individuals working in an organisation.

The benefits of improving work-life balance may be seen from two different points. First is the view of enterprise, where positive factors as improved job-relevant knowledge and skills, better employee motivation, health and morale are just some things to be mentioned. Second view is the individual side, where greater personal and professional satisfaction, advancement opportunities and improved quality of life are important. (Cedefop 2002, 36.)

Learning habits applied to organisational learning are mainly described as informal or non-formal. Next chapters these learning types are described and quality in both types is explained.

2.3 QUALITY IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Less than ten years ago, continuing training was viewed either as a means of career progression or assistance to new companies making ac hoc adaptations to new technological developments. Two factors have now revolutionised industry and business. Massive investment in information and communication technologies (ICT) and globalisation of markets has lead, and continue to lead, to intense modernisation in companies. (Cedefop 2002, 13.)

Workplace-oriented learning supports real processes in the company. It helps solve recurrent problems in production or work organisation. It helps employees to understand better business processes and the reasons behind company-based procedures. (Janssens 2002, 13.)

Work learning, or work based learning, is the type of gathering new information that has raised its importance recently. Employees´ duties and training in the workplace mean that they develop overall skills, which few others have. The documentation of expertice from the workplace has largely linked with customer requirements or regulatory requirements. (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 21).

New skills are needed in all fields of work and all work cannot be learned outside the work place. Because work based learning is hard to define, it rarely leads to any kind of certification. "Learning in the workplace" is always linked to informal and often hidden learning processes such as "learning by doing" (Janssens 2002, 22). This type of learning is often classified according to definitions of non- of informal learning.

Informal learning is based on the form of informal thinking and understanding. The premises of thinking describe it. Premises behind thinking are built and evaluated self and all effects of feelings or beliefs should be left outside from thinking processes. (Garnham & Oakhill 1995, 256-257.)

Perkins (1985)[2] defines premises of informal understanding building and developing according to knowledge creation. Informal understanding is defined in two ways. Understanding may contain of several arguments, definitions may be unbelievable and may not be seen in wider perspective. Good informal learning is described according to Perkins as compare of different pieces of argument, usually seen from as many sides as possible. According to him the everyday understanding is modelling the situation. He describes appearing mistakes being cause of situated models which are either one sided or imperfect or both. (Garnham & Oakhill 1995, 257-259.)

Informal learning concerns learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. It may be intentional of the basis but in most cases it is non-intentional. (European Comission 2001, 33.) Informal learning can be in short described such as inter-generational learning, experts teaching novices. (Pole 2004, 9.)

There are several different and similar definitions for informal learning. The problem is the quality side. Because this type of learning is usually non-intentional and as well quite tacit it is hard to assess it without mentioning to certify. Some countries (for example France) has though tried to establish system for the recognition of various types of informal learning within higher education (Gallacher & Feutrie 2003, 73) but because of the national specialities it is limited for wider use. Also some researchers have tried to quantify students´ participation in informal learning activities (Gerber, Cavallo & Marek 2001, Gerber, Marek & Cavallo 2001) but these surveys are not suitable for adults without modifications. The areas of interest could at least be used. These seven subscales of The Informal Learning Opportunities Assay (ILOA) multiple-choice questionnaire are (1) social activities with family/or friends; (2) activities done alone; (3) school-related activities; (4) lessons, classes or group activities not school-related; (5) work and domestic chores; (6) travel and (7) general (Gerber, Marek & Cavallo 2001, 572).

[2] **Perkins, D.N. 1989.** Reasoning as it is and could be in **Garnham, A. & Oakhill, J. 1995.** Thinking and Reasoning

In the third sector[3], individuals themselves are responsible for describing all the skills they have acquired by means of informal learning. Courses and studies are to be documented by the organisation, which was in charge of the education. (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 28.)

Non-formal learning is defined as the type of activity as for example vocational skills acquires at the workplace. It is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. Compared with informal learning, non-formal learning is structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. From the learners' perspective, learning is intentional. (European Comission 2001, 33.)

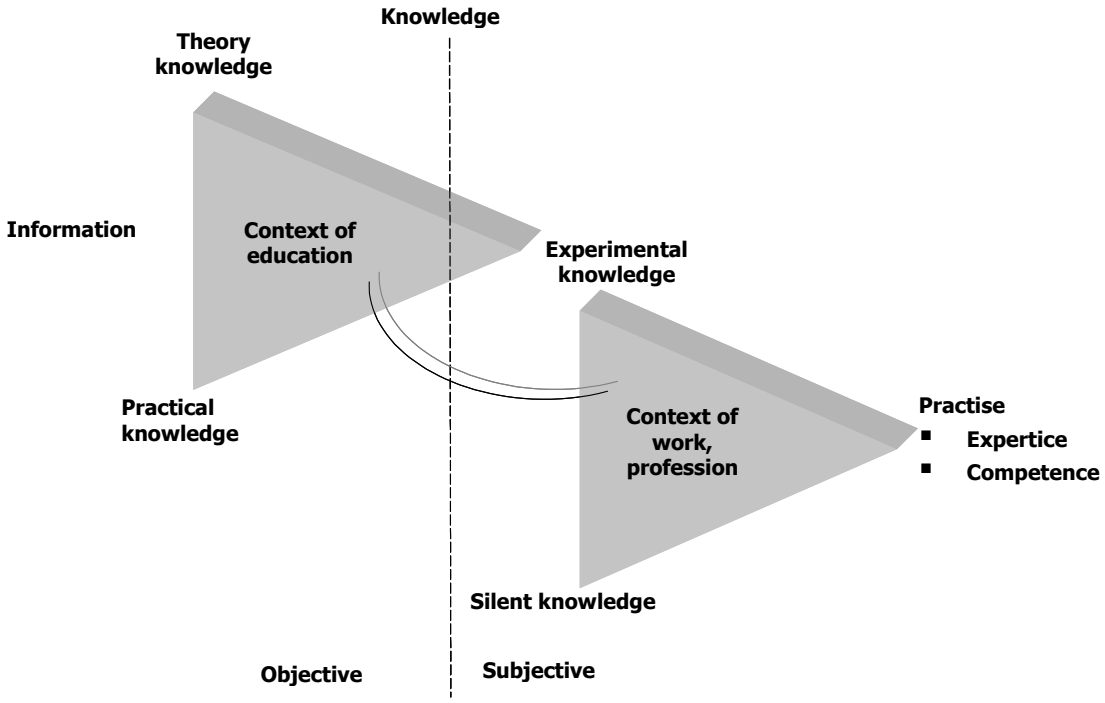
The validation of non-formal learning (ie. measuring the value of non-formal learning) is a process in which individuals have their overall skills validated in relation to various areas of application. The validation of all overall skills, regardless of where or how they have been acquired, is necessary if the target is to create a society offering lifelong learning for all. (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 11.)

More systematic documentation of non-formal learning in the workplace will be able to assist individual employees with career development by making them aware of their skills. Documentation and validation of work on non-formal learning has to be organised in such a way as to provide closeness to users and be readily accessible. In the work place, work is organised on the documentation of non-formal learning individually in different companies. As well individual institutions organise validation on non-formal learning for admission to universities. In common, higher educational level the specialist requirements are defined in co-operation with the specialist environments and the people responsible for admissions. Study suitability is assessed in relation to specialist content and teaching arrangements. (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 14, 18, 21.)

The validation of non-formal learning in the workplace must identify and draw attention to skills based on duties, working methods and co-operation both in the workplace and with external environments. The main importance lies in description if how work is to be carried out and assessment criteria, which are used in any staff discussions, will act as reference points for the documentation of non-formal learning in the workplace. (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 23.)

[3] "The term third sector includes all learning in all arenas other than workplace and the educational system" (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 27).

Poikela and Poikela (2004) described work base learning as informal type of learning with the picture shown below. In this picture the distinction between formal education/training and work base learning is divided in to two different sides by the type of information.



In Poikela, E. 2001. Tieto ja Osaaminen

Figure 2. Objective and subjective side of knwoledge and context of learning

In this picture theory is described as something written on the books and practice as something on tools and functions. Experimental knowledge is built by operating with the target. Education is not information delivery but it aims building trust with qualitatively good experimental knowledge where theory and practise are integrated. (Poikela & Poikela 2004.)

Although the documentation of non-formal learning in the workplace is the responsibility of the individual, it is also a process, which has a bearing on the company and has to be supported in local agreements in order to succeed (The Realcompetance Project 1999-2002, 22).

2.4 CHECKPOINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Commission is demanding strategies that "adopt mechanisms to maximise the quality of the learning experience it self and also policy/implementation processes and services associated with learning" (European Commission 2001, 14). Definitions that the Commission has set for the mechanisms in informal and non-formal learning should include "robust quality assurance tools for non-formal and informal learning (e.g. international and national standards and guidelines, inspection systems, quality awards, financial instruments)" (European Commission 2001, 14).

According to Commission (2003) quite a few countries have begun to establish systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning. As seen in the context of lifelong learning key components should include flexible qualification structures, which not only integrate the different streams and levels of general learning and education. Structures should also involve vocational and technical education and training. (European Commission 2003, 10.)

Questionnaires for assessment have certain limitations that should be taken into consideration as well when thinking about non-formal and informal assessment. Instruments built up for assessing informal and non-formal learning should be easy to administer and score, functional with ethnically diverse student populations, and applicable across disciplines (Gerber, Marek & Cavallo 2001, 572).

There are several issues that are highlighted in many articles concerning TQM and informal/non-formal learning according of which it is possible to evaluate different quality elements. Some issues are listed below.

1. To develop principles to the formulation and implementation of an information strategy
2. To recommend improvements to information for learners
3. Emphasize links between knowledge and information and core business (i.e. teaching, learning, research)
4. Focus on information and information needs, with technology as an enabler
5. Show commitment to sharing and communication of information to achieve objectives
6. To be sure what is the information that is provided for the learners
7. What kind of information should be provided to learners?
8. Find out the strengths and weaknesses and eliminate weaknesses
9. Shared responsibility for business and academia to learn, teach and practice TQM
10. TQM should be incorporated into academic institutions core curriculum
11. Promoting lifelong learning should include the opportunity for systematic identification of competencies however acquired.
12. Validation of competencies in terms of transferability to other situations.

13. Creation of opportunities for certification or for admission to further leading to new qualifications.
14. Learning processes such as reflection, cognitive skills, social skills and operational skills are recognised and studied.
15. Learning is a new form of work.
16. Work base learning as credits: to document the results ie. make learning visible.
17. To evaluate employers competences.
18. Employers and representatives will ensure any support in local agreements.
19. Employers and/or representatives will inform employees of the method.
20. Employees will compile their own CVs.
21. Employees will describe/complete. Arrangements will be made for staff discussions or guidance where so required.
22. Employees and employers will implement and assess the descriptions (staff discussions).
23. Employers will provide certification on skills certificates from the place of work.
24. Validation takes place when someone applies for a job or when the documentation is used internally within the company.
25. Methods of non-formal learning assessment have to be simple to use and not take up too much time.
26. A national system for the documentation of non-formal learning will gain legitimacy in the workplace when the benefits of the method become clear to both employers and employees.
27. On the third sector[4], individual organisations will provide information to students, course participants and voluntary participants of the organisation.
28. Individual organisations are responsible for guidance for the people who want to make use of a documentation method.
29. Individuals draw up their own CVs
30. Individuals identify and describe their own skills.
31. Individuals carry out a self-assessment of the skills identified ad described.
32. Individuals themselves certify the skills described.
33. Non-formal learning in the third sector includes the documentation of courses and study activities, as well as the description of individuals´ comprehensive skills.
34. Both the methods and the tools for charting and documenting non-formal learning are based to all intents and purposes on individuals´ own efforts.

[4] See definition on page 5

35. The documentation of non-formal learning in the third sector may provide individuals with inspiration and motivation reinforce their self-confidence and provide a better foundation for further training and work.
36. Documentation may also have an effect on people feeling valued, that they perceive their skills as useful and important for their work, and they may therefore take on additional duties in voluntary organisational life.
37. In higher education non-formal learning is usually assessed either through self-declarations and portfolios, or by means of tests.
38. When adults are given the right to document their non-formal learning this causes adaptation process to national systems to suit different requirements and interests.

Also issues of ISO 9000 (http://www.iso.ch/iso/en/iso9000-14000/iso9000/qmp.html) applied to learning processes can work as a guide supporting plans of informal/non-formal learning. Short descriptions are shown below.

1. Central result of this thinking on the ideology should describe:

1. The needs and expectations of the learners are considered and understood
2. Make sure that the target of the courses are tied up to the learners needs and expectations
3. Inform the organisation about the needs of the learners and the interest groups
4. Measure the learners satisfaction level and react to the results
5. Keep the learner groups in systematic order

2. In the teachers point of view the challenge of leadership lies in:

1. All customer groups, including course students, faculty personnel, faculty leaders, administration, principal and in wider sense all society's needs are considered.
2. To set up challenging targets
3. Create and maintain common values and work fair
4. Create trust and remove fears
5. Offer decent resources, teaching and freedom for the students to work responsible and liable

→ To inspire and encourage the students and recognize their achievements

3. The challenges that the teachers confront in involvement of people:

1. People understand the importance on participation and their role in the course and in the organisation as whole
2. Students are made aware of the factors that may possible hinder their performance
3. Students are directed to take the responsibility of their own problems and how to solve them in a way that the help can be found when needed and the students know where to search help
4. Students are guided to evaluate their own competence according to their personal needs
5. The teacher helps the students to actively seek possibilities to develop their competence, knowledge and experience
6. Students are directed to distribute information and experience freely with others

→ The problems are discussed openly

4. For teacher to create process approach in a (web-) course:

1. To use structured tools to clarify the functions that make possible to reach the anticipated results. So the course is built in different subcategories that make the targets possible to achieve.
2. Create clear responsibilities and obligation to lead the key functions, i.e. to structure learning information for students by which each roles are described.
3. To recognize the key functions interface in an organisation and between them. The central issue here is to find similarities between different courses so that same information will not be offered two times to same students at least without linking it to previous knowledge.
4. Central issue is to focus on such factors as resources, methods and materials, which improve key functions in an organisation. Courses should use existing materials that support co-operational action between the teachers and that eases the students to create all reaching understanding of the knowledge.
5. To evaluate all possible functional risks, followings and effects that are targeted to students, teachers and other reference groups.

5. The teacher should pay attention in system approach to management to:

1. Course should be structured in a way that the targets are possible to reach most effectively
2. Connections between different learning materials should be understood and also should be known how to use them
3. Be able to create a structured approach which harmonize and withdraw different materials together
4. Understand better the roles and responsibilities, that are necessary to reach a common target and diminish the hindering factors in co-operational work
5. To understand the wider boundary conditions that the organisation has set up for different alternatives and measure the boundaries set up by resources before beginning the course
6. Focus and define how certain functions are supposed to work

→ Continuously develop the function with measurement and evaluation

6. The organisational development process should change according to:

1. To make a consistent organisation wide focus on continual development
2. To offer continual development tools and education/training for employers
3. All workers should see a common target for development concerning courses, teaching processes and teaching systems
4. Set a target directing continual improvement and create a measuring tools for follow-up research

→ To identify and recognize the improvements

7. In development process of factual approach to decision-making the teacher should describe the process according to next issues:

1. Make sure that data and details are correct and trust worth enough
2. May all interested people, who may get use form, be able to access the information (when needed)
3. Analyse the data and information with valuable tool/measure methods
4. Making decisions and taking action based on factual analysis, balanced with experience and intuition

8. Teacher should apply definitions in her/his work by:

1. Creating such relation with the students that increases the passing rate (in a short run) and in the future possibly work for the co-operation
2. To tie up the expertice and resources between the course participants so that it supports both sides work
3. To recognize and choose most knowledgeable workers in every work-area
4. To create clear and open discussion connection between the teacher and course participants
5. Share knowledge and plans for the future
6. Create common development and improvement functions
7. Encourage and support for improvements and give recognition on them

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3. WHAT CHARACTERISES INFORMAL LEARNING

Formal learning is one of three basic educational formats. The other two are non-formal and informal education (Husen and Postlewaith 1985; Page, Thomas, and Marshall 1977; and Roundtree 1981).

The following definitions follow closely those presented in the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* but they provide further details which are useful for our analysis.

Informal learning is voluntary and self-directed. It results from personal exploration and discourse and may occur spontaneously in everyday life situations, within the family circle, the neighbourhood, and so on. Informal education is distinguished from the other two by having no authority figure or mediator. The learner is motivated intrinsically (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995) and determines the path taken to acquire the desired knowledge, skill, or abilities.

Non formal learning occurs in a planned but highly adaptable way, in institutions, organisations, and situations outside the spheres of formal or informal education.
It shares with formal education the characteristic of being mediated, but the motivation for learning may be wholly intrinsic to the learner. Examples of non formal education include continuing education courses, organised field trips, museum visits, and structured programs developed by organisations such as the Boy Scouts. The learner's objectives may be to increase skills and knowledge, as well as to experience the emotional rewards associated with increased love for a subject or increased passion for learning.

Formal learning takes place in a planned way at recognised institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. Teachers mediate the learning in a formal setting, and the student generally follows the teacher/leader's agenda. The teacher's goal is to impart knowledge, and the learner's goal is to increase his/her knowledge and skills.

The problem with these definitions is that people often organise educational event as part of their everyday experience and so the lines blur rapidly.

Most educators see the three formats existing within a continuum, with indistinct rather than sharply defined borders.
The distinction made is largely administrative. The continuum of lifelong learning brings non-formal and informal learning more fully into the picture.

As the Council Resolution stated [5]" lifelong learning must cover learning from the pre-school age to that of post-retirement, including the entire spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Furthermore, lifelong learning must be understood as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic social and/or employment-related perspective., Finally the principles in this context should be: the individual as the subject of learning highlighting the importance of an authentic equality of opportunities and quality in learning".

What has to be underlined clearly and strongly, is that in principle we cannot take for granted that formal learning is synonymous with quality assurance and non-formal and informal learning, since less structured and not so controlled, are not. On the contrary that formal educational system is so structured and rigid that it can be seen as repressive, too costly, generally cognitive and not able to support people's attitudes to becoming active life-long learners.

We can find excellent examples of valuable learning experiences in all three formats.
In contrast, we can find people who perceive their past formal background as a disastrous experience and they see themselves as failed learners. Alternatively we can find informal and non-formal learning situations in which quality and the positive results depend on variables which are not predefined and/or stable.

It can be underlined that procedures and methods to design, assure, control and assess the quality of learning and teaching experiences in formal settings have been considered relevant in the policy agenda at European level. Less awareness and effort have been given to introduce and assure quality approaches and tools in non-formal and informal learning sectors.

If we look at the three learning formats of we can identify different elements/characteristics.
Some learning activities may be perceived as belonging exclusively to one format, but they also may share aspects of the others.
In other words, each characteristic belongs to a continuum in which the effort to define it within a specific format is more related to the need of labelling or classifying than to read the real and concrete way the learning experiences are taking place.
There is a lot "informal" in the formal setting and vice versa there is a lot "formal" in informal and non formal learning experiences.

[5] Official Journal of the European Communities "Council Resolution" of 27 June 2002 on Lifelong Learning (2002/c 163/01)

3.1 THE LEARNING CONTINUUM

The key issue involves how all three learning formats can be integrated and seen as a means of providing a unique path/strategy for individual-personal/organisational/societal development. The success element is determined by the way each learning format can communicate and dialogue with the others, how informal-and non-formal can be integrated in formal learning and how they can serve and benefit the others.

CONTINUUM
INFORMAL/NON FORMAL/FORMAL

Tacit Knowledge Base	⟷	Explicit Knowledge Base
Non Documented	⟷	Documented
Unstructured	⟷	Structured
Accidental	⟷	Intentional
Inductive	⟷	Deductive
Active	⟷	Passive
Intrinsic	⟷	Extrinsic
Spontaneous	⟷	Planned
Self-Evaluation	⟷	Etero Evaluation
Not Formalised Recognition and Credit Transfer System	⟷	Agreed Recognition System and Credit Transfer

In particular:

Tacit Knowledge (TK) Base versus Explicit Knowledge Base: "Knowledge that enters into the production of behaviours and/or the constitution of mental states but is not ordinarily accessible to consciousness". As Michael Polanyi (1967: 4) wrote in The Tacit Dimension, we should start from the fact that 'we can know more than we can tell'[6]. TK is a kind of hidden knowledge, which according to Polanyi can't be fully

[6] http://www.infed.org/thinkers/polanyi.htm

specified by words (with language), which can only be shown, demonstrated by actions"

"Informal Learning on the other hand is a kind of learning which proceeds both unintentionally and "unconsciously" (better: without focal awareness) and can't therefore be provided by pure language (transfer of words)" [7].

As it can be seen there is a strong connection between Informal Learning and Tacit Knowledge, nevertheless there are experiences in non-formal setting which are based on "explicit knowledge".
At the same time, in formal setting the concept of tacit knowledge is not unknown (even thought the dominant parading based on explicit knowledge) and didactic methods applied such as discovery-learning, problem solving assignment can help learner to use the tacit knowledge and to transform it in "explicit knowledge" and to apply it in real tasks.

Non Documented versus documented and Unstructured versus structured:

Even thought the most common delivery way of the informal learning format are non-course- based activities (e.g. talks or presentations, discussion, information, advice and guidance) it is possible to find also planned and structured learning such as short courses organized in response to identified interests and needs but delivered in flexible and informal ways and in informal community settings. The key issues in non-formal and informal settings is to introduce measures and procedures, which can provide evidence, keep record and give visibility and recognition to the learning occurred.

Accidental versus intentional, Active versus Passive, Intrinsic versus exstinsic, Spontaneus versus planned:

By definition the informal learning is accidental, active, intrinsic and spontaneous and these characteristics allow people with a non successful education background but having interests, needs and priorities to start to gain knowledge/improve competence and act in a learning environments which is less structured and less similar to the previous school experience. The strength element is really related to the fact that informal and non—formal learning can play a key role to make people to get back to learn, to re-discover the pleasure and the joy of learning, to rebuilt self-esteem as learner and to help them to approach formal learning with a different view.

[7] http://www.peter.baumgartner.name/addedValuesPI/stories/storyReader$832

Inductive versus deductive

The distinction is based on the learning process itself rather than on the effect of the process i.e. the nature of the learning achieved. The distinction is 'input' based rather than 'outcome' based.
In the majority of informal Learning experiences the process is largely *inductive*, the source of information is through 'acting' (Active Experimentation) or 'observing' (Reflective Observation,). In the majority of traditional Learning environment, the source of information is 'symbolic' and is gained via lectures, tutorials, reading etc, and the process is largely *deductive.*
As we mentioned before, we can find formal setting in which the content/subject matters (e.g. physic, chemistry, technical,) and the objectives allow teachers to choose a more deductive approaches in their didactics.

Self-Evaluation versus etero-evaluation: in the informal learning the most adopted methodology for assessing the learning occurred is based on a self-assessment process. The process helps the learner to reflect on the path and on the achievements and recognise the changes. In defining the results and the outcomes it is important to take into consideration that a positive learning experience (in informal settings) can often lead to outcomes such as:

- Significant increased self-confidence and self-esteem;
- Perception and identification of themselves as learners,
- Development of knowledge and understanding
- Improved personal and social skills
- Greater personal autonomy
- New practical skills
- Involvement in further learning in different places and at different levels
- Wider involvement in the local community (more active citizenship).
- Changes in personal life and quality of life.

Nevertheless a more structured approach, in particular for those who would like to have the outcomes formally recognised is obviously necessary. Etero-assessment could be done by different means and ways. Etero-evaluation can be introduce within the informal learning by bringing in a great level of flexibility and the personalisation (e.s. learning portfolio) that is fundamental for capturing the richness of the experiences and do not discourage the learner who may feel the fear of failure with pre-established and standard assessment procedure.

Not Formalised Recognition and Credit Transfer System: For people who are interested, it is important to provide them the possibility to have recognised the results and the outcomes of the learning occurred. The key concept is base on the fact that "learning" is "learning" whenever and wherever took place.
One immediate consequence of an acceptance that an integrated process is appropriate within an education/ training system is that 'learning itself' is placed at the centre of the education process. Also, because of the wide range of circumstances in which it is acknowledged that learning can take place, the workplace or living space of the learner can be viewed as a potentially rich learning environment. A further implication for education/training providers is that they should devote a significant effort to maximise the opportunity afforded by such environments for the optimisation of the learning, which can take place within them. An inevitable consequence of this approach is that equal recognition must be given to learning whether it is gained formally in the classroom situation or informally through general work and life experience.

To conclude…

Consideration of quality within formal, informal and non formal learning means focusing on the quality of the learning experience in itself in terms of:

- **Meaningfulness, coherence, relevance for the final users and for the context in which the user is living and working,**
- **Use of resources (human and materials) which have intrinsic elements of quality and that can initiate, foster and accompany the learning process; support the motivation and the joy of learning, and accommodate the different ways of learning and the emerging and changing needs.**
- **Design and implementation of processes and steps which are based on methods, procedures and strategies which have been pre-designed, documented, and tested and which have produced previous positive results.**

3.2 INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS TO BE KEPT IN MIND

These are some of the main elements that, although sometimes are present in formal learning, they particularly characterise non formal and informal learning which must be taken into consideration in order to introduce quality:

- The importance of the practical side of the learning process;
- The role of the community: community –based learning plays a critical role in widening participation among people who are educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged.

- The importance of the context (situated learning): the location of learning is extremely important, often more so than its actual focus. This is due not only to practical but to psychological and cultural factors. In some areas it is found that people are very reluctant to participate in activities outside their familiar local environment.
  Four propositions are common to the range of perspectives that now come together under the banner of situated learning:
  - ◊ High-level or expert knowledge and skill can be gained from everyday experiences at work, and amongst the community or family.
  - ◊ Domain-specific knowledge is necessary for the development of expertise.
  - ◊ Learning is a social process.
  - ◊ Knowledge is embedded in practice and transformed through goal directed behaviour
  - ◊ learning is strictly related to the place where learning is provided.
- The role of tacit knowledge;
- The learning process arises from individual and group activities and interests; Supporting the idea that people should be viewed both as learners and educators. This entails cultivating communities animated by dialogue, democracy and respect for truth – and seeing education and learning not as individual acts but as an aspect of living together.
- Learner-centeredness and respect of the importance of the individual person
- Approaching learning as a lifelong process
- Value-based motivation
- Accessibility for everyone

[8]As the Memorandum well points out, lifelong learning is not just about a more integrated supply of education, training and learning opportunities: it is also – and maybe more importantly – about generating awareness and motivation to learn:

"People will only plan for consistent learning activities throughout their lives if they want to learn"

Among the factors that would discourage people to learn the Memorandum identifies the following:

- learning methods that remind them of previous unsuccessful learning experiences;
- limitations of access in terms of time, place and affordability;
- lack of recognition of cultural perspectives and life experience;
- lack of recognition of previous knowledge, skills and expertise.

[8] This part is taken from an article "Maybe learning at home, but not alone"- How ICT can support the building of learning communities -By Claudio Dondi, SCIENTER, Italy

If we translate the identification of these inhibiting factors into principles for action, the following could be the result:

1. offer and support learning experiences in which adult learners are stimulated to take an active role, to continuously check the relevance of what they are learning and to self-evaluate;
2. provide the opportunity to learn in a multiplicity of environments, with few or no time limitations, and at an affordable cost (not only the "price" but also the cost of time and transport required to take part in a learning programme);
3. adopt learning systems and design methods that are able to build on cultural specificity and life experience, so letting individuals personalise their learning programme and bring their "added value" to the learning groups;
4. provide and support learning paths that do not oblige them to endure already known and practised contents for the sake of a disciplined structure, but rather that are built on individual specific needs and requirements.

Although these four "design principles" may sound relatively obvious and theoretically accepted, they bring with them a revolution of education and training provision as we have been traditionally used to conceive it.
It is not just a problem of training teachers: teachers have to be given the time and tools to accept a radically new role in the learning system.
It is not just a problem of "packaging" learning contents and making them available to learners when and where they want: the quality of the learning experience must be designed.
It is not just a problem of letting adults present themselves and use their own style of expression: the potential of adults to support peers or to bring new perspectives in a learning group must be considered and utilised as far as possible.
It is not just a problem of "shortening" education and training provision according to previous knowledge, skills and expertise: learners must be individually helped to build a really meaningful and motivating learning path, corresponding to their needs and wishes. *And this is particularly true for informal and non-formal learning in which the support of motivation and pleasure of learning are the key aspects.*

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4. A TENTATIVE APPROACH

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this chapter is to suggest some quality principles and related criteria which can be applied to informal and non-formal learning, and which take into consideration the specificities of these types of learning as well as the nature of the settings in which the learning process is usually taking place.

Despite the way that learning can be defined and classified, we are firmly convinced, that the **quality of a learning experience** is dependent on the inherent quality of the processes involved, in terms of:

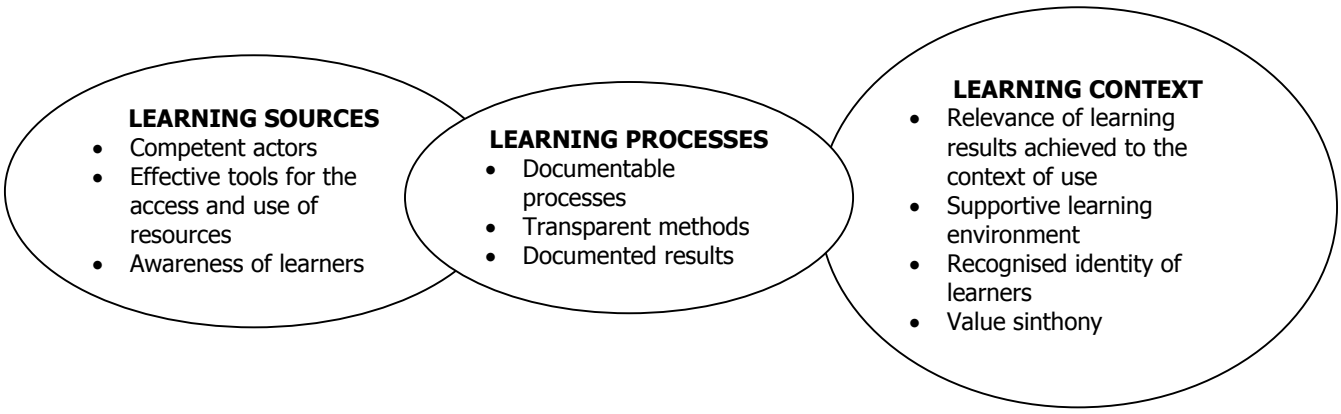
- how the resources (human or material) used in any learning setting are designed, implemented, monitored and assessed;,
- the value which is given to the learning experience and development path of each individual and
- the coherence and meaningfulness of the experience with the context in which the learner is working and living.

In the **SEEQUEL project** "investigation of e-Learning quality" we identified three key areas of an **e-Learning experience**. The inherent quality of each of these areas has a vital impact on the overall quality of the learning experience.
The three areas identified were:

- Learning Sources,
- Learning Context,
- Core Learning Processes.

It is clear that when considering total quality management systems and the need to assure quality in any single step, the list of principles and criteria could be very long and detailed. Seequel has taken into consideration the fact that in both the informal and non-formal learning sectors, norms and standards are neither particularly welcome or uniformly implemented. Therefore Seequel has identified ten key principles, which, if implemented can introduce and assure quality in the provision of learning.

These ten principles are related to the three key areas of the learning experience:



4.1 TOOLS FOR INTRODUCING QUALITY ELEMENTS IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING

In this section, you will find a set of tools which is aimed at helping you introduce quality elements in to your learning provisions by suggesting to you a set of practical questions and statements on the basis of which it will be possible to initiate a process of self-evaluation and to design a quality improvement plan.

Checklist: Quality Criteria and their relevance to you

Please review the following list of criteria (based on the ten key principles)

Learning sources	1. Competent actors 2. Effective tools for the access and use of resources 3. Awareness of learners
Learning processes	4. Documentable processes 5. Transparent methos 6. Documented results
Learning context	7. Relevance of learning results achieved to the context of use 8. Supportive learning environment 9. Recognised identity of learners 10. Value sinthony

Having reviewed the criteria check the relevant boxes, keeping in mind not only your own personal agreement with the proposed criteria, but also their relevance and applicability to your context/institution.

1	2	3
Very interesting and feasible	Interesting but not immediately feasible	Not really relevant

After having run through the check list, you should immediately identify those aspects on which you may concentrate your future efforts and actions (both short term and medium-long term). The key aspects are the ones you have judged as very interesting and feasible (1) and interesting but not immediately feasible (2).

LEARNING RESOURCES				
KEY PRINCIPLE	***RELATED CRITERIA***	***1***	***2***	***3***
Competent actors	• Staff who are involved either formally or informally need to be qualified to a satisfactory level either academically or through experience.			
	• Presence of a system in which experience and academic qualification are equally valued			
	• Presence of a staff summary profile so that those with the relevant experience to meet the learning needs can be appropriately identified			
	• Presence of competent staff and advisors in order to support the learning path			
	• Presence of competent staff who are able to support and help the individual			
	• Presence of an operational Staff Recognition mechanism			
Effective tools for the access and use of resources	• Regular evaluation of the quality of the materials (by staff and learners)			
	• Materials/resources considered ineffective (by staff and learners/users) are deleted from the provision			
	• Plans & measures for managing the technical resources are operational			
	• Availability of a diverse range of resources able to accommodate individual learning styles			
	• Use of materials that include different didactic methods and strategies in order to support pleasure in learning (negotiated pedagogy)			
	• Clarity of both language and content of the learning materials/resources			
	• Reusability and Technical quality of resources is assured			
	• Scientific correctness of the learning materials/resources is assured			
	• Resource Selection is based on agreed and transparent criteria			
	• Copyrights and IPR are respected			
	• Accessibility is guaranteed (e.g. people with disabilities)			
Awareness of the learners	• The Learner's peculiarities, interests, needs, experiences, previous knowledge and skills are recognised			
	• The Learner's role as a source of learning within the community is guaranteed and recognised			
	• The Learner's motivation is supported and enhanced			
	• The ability to learn is supported and enhanced by using different styles and methods coherent with individual preferences.			

LEARNING PROCESS				
KEY PRINCIPLE	***RELATED CRITERIA***	***1***	***2***	***3***
Documentable processes	• Tools for detecting emerging needs of the learners during the course are in place			
	• Tools and measures to monitor the learning experience are in place			
	• A System is implemented in order to track and to collect statistical data on the behaviours of the user population			
	• Tools for collecting data on the learning progression are in place			
	• Learner feedback on the provided services and on the overall experience is requested and regularly collected, evaluated.& reported			
Transparent methods	• Systems for assessing the effectiveness in the use of the organisation's resources to enhance learning satisfaction are in place			
	• Systems for assessing the effectiveness of the services implemented in order to enhance learning satisfaction are in place			
	• Presence of Flexibility in the organisations structure and methods			
	• Presence of Diversified and personalised learning supply			
	• Presence of a system for cost control/monitoring and optimisation of financial procedures			
	• A System for supporting contextualization and abstraction of the knowledge created is in place			
Documented results	• Presence of a phase devoted to the pre-definition of expected results and outcomes			
	• The expected results are clear and agreed among the learners and the staff			
	• Presence of an evaluation system to measure the extent to which informal learning meets the objectives of the learners and to identify the overall range of outcomes (which are wider than the original learning objectives)			
	• Opportunities for formal accreditation and recognition of learning achievements are in place (for those who want it)			
	• Suitable Measure and comparison of the learning achieved against criteria established for the purpose are in place			
	• The methods for collecting evidence of the learning results are flexible • Tools and methods for the collection and collation of the evidence that learning has occurred and for the independent verification of this evidence are in place			

LEARNING CONTEXT				
KEY PRINCIPLE	***RELATED CRITERIA***	***1***	***2***	***3***
Relevance of learning results to the context of use	• Procedures to support learners in reflecting on the impact that the learning can have on the individual, family or wider community are in place			
	• Procedures for helping learners to recognise the transferability potential of the competence/knowledge developed in informal and non formal settings to both a formal context and the workplace are in place			
	• Strategies that motivate the learners to continue further learning at different levels (from informal learning to formal learning) are in place			
Supportive learning environment	• Services aimed at informing, motivating, encouraging, and supporting learners are in place			
	• Implementation of strategies that enable progression between different learning levels (modular approaches, credit-based award, qualification framework, APEL -Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning)			
	• Existence of an organisational awareness adequate for the implementation of a quality system and capable of supporting effective management of acquired knowledge			
	• Availability of both Informal and more formal forms of learning opportunity at the same site			
	• rocedures for creating and establishing medium and long-term partnerships among both learning/training providers and suppliers are in place			
	• Presence of a system to support and enhance the interaction and collaboration within the "group of learners'" (learning community)			
	• A System for supporting knowledge creation and exchange is in place			
Recognised identity of learners	• Presence of a system with different kinds of "exit" or continuation strategies for learners			
	• The diversity and identity of each learner is guaranteed by the individualisation of the learning/training path			
	• The learner's background is considered to be a valuable resource for the learning community			
Value sinthony	• Policies and measures to support values such as collaboration, accessibility, social inclusion, socio-cultural diversity are in place			
	• The values considered important to the organisation are shared and communicated among the staff			

Check list: on your current quality Position

This check-list is designed to promote discussion and debate within you team.
Please take into consideration, the criteria of the previous check-list to which you should have attributed a judgement of either very interesting and feasible (1) or very interesting but not immediately feasible (2).

The comments and actions areas are left blank in order to allow you record your relevant notes and actions undertaken.

The key issue is not to measure oneself against a best performer but to start to reflect on which action can be taken in order to introduce quality elements in the informal and non-formal supply.

Please go through the questions and check the relevant boxes according to the following response scale.

1	2	3
not implemented	partially implemented	fully implemented

Learning resources: competent actors	***1***	***2***	***3***
Procedures for staff-profiling are in place	1	2	3
The procedure for selecting staff for the delivery of learning is based on their competency profile			
A system for recognizing the staff's competencies/educational background/experience is in place			
A map of the competencies required by your staff in order to provide guidance and support and to manage effectively the learning experience is available			
Training needs analysis of the staff is conducted on regular basis			
Comment			
Action			

Learning resources: Effective tools for the access and use of resources	***1***	***2***	***3***
Pre- use selection procedures for checking the quality of the materials/resources are in place			
Feedback procedures for assessing the in-use learning effectiveness and relevance of the materials/resources are in place			
Feedback procedures for assessing the post-use learning effectiveness and relevance of the materials/resources are in place			
The resource supply is differentiated in order to allow personalisation and customisation appropriate to individual learning styles and needs			
Copyright and IPR regulation is respected			
Data analysis for checking the level of both accessibility and effective resource usage is conducted on a regular basis			
Comment			
Action			

Learning resources: Awareness of learners	***1***	***2***	***3***
Systems to help learners recognise and valorise both their competencies and the knowledge they have acquired during their lives are in place.			
Methods for supporting learner motivation and self-esteem are in place			
Methods for valorising learners' competencies among the learning community are in place.			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING PROCESSES: DOCUMENTABLE PROCESSES	***1***	***2***	***3***
Measures for monitoring the learning experiences are in place			
System and measures to track and monitor the behaviour of the users are in place			
Systems to control and monitor costs are in place			
In the event of anticipated problems or malfunctions appropriate back-up procedures are in place			
Processes which have been considered successful and effective are shared among staff and personnel and used to train new staff			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING PROCESSES: TRANSPARENT METHODS	***1***	***2***	***3***
Measures for monitoring the effectiveness of the services delivered are in place			
The supply of services is differentiated in order to allow personalisation and customisation appropriate to individual learning styles and needs			
Didactic methods are flexible so as to allow their personalisation and customisation for individual learning styles and needs			
Methods which have been considered successful and effective are shared among staff and personnel and used to train new staff			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING PROCESSES: DOCUMENTED RESULTS	***1***	***2***	***3***
The results and outcomes of the learning experience are agreed between the staff and learners			
The evaluation system is able to measure to what extent informal learning meets the expected objectives and outcomes			
A suitably accredited system to recognise and value the learning achievements (for those who want it) is in place			
Feedback procedures for assessing the learning effectiveness have been implemented.			
Evidence and records of the results achieved are organized and stored within the system			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING CONTEXT: RELEVANCE OF LEARNING RESULTS TO THE CONTEXT OF USE	1	2	3
A system for allowing credit transfer from the informal to the formal setting is foreseen			
A process which helps learners reflect on the transferability of their acquired competencies and skills to their specific context of use, is in place			
The learning experience is built in a flexible manner so as to ensure its contextualisation and relevance to the learner's context			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING CONTEXT: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	1	2	3
A Plan to support interaction and collaboration within the learners' community is in place			
Measures for assuring quality within organisational procedures are in place			
The vision of the quality of learning is shared and agreed within the organisation			
Medium and long term partnerships with learning and training providers are established			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING CONTEXT: RECOGNISED IDENTITY OF LEARNERS	1	2	3
A system for learner profiling is in place			
The diversity and identity of each individual learner is guaranteed			
Comment			
Action			

LEARNING CONTEXT: VALUE SINTHONY	1	2	3
The value system of the organisation is shared among the staff			
A process for collecting, discussingand confronting differing points of view among the various stakeholders regarding shared values is in place			
Different stakeholders are consulted on regular basis			
Comment			
Action			

4.2 THE BENEFIT IN INTRODUCING QUALITY APPROACH IN THE INFORMAL AND NON FORMAL LEARNING: SOME EXAMPLES

In order to exemplify the benefits that the adoption of some element of a quality approach could bring to informal and non-formal learning experiences, we have presented some scenarios.

Scenario: Initial training within an enterprise

Context	On the job training is foreseen for new employees. Senior colleagues support the new entrant
Possible problems	The training is not planned and its quality varies depending on the available, time the personal attitudes of the senior colleagues and the routine demands of the daily activities.
What could be done	Improve the definition of the initial on the job training e.g. provide clear definition of objectives, methods to be used and expected results. Select only senior supporters who show the relational capabilities required
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A Quality approach can assure more effective management of the process, the opportunity to check and compare the level of learning achieved with that expected and the implementation of a more effective and long-term strategy for human resources development. In addition, every new comer's learning experience can be documented and improvement strategies can be proposed on the basis of previous experience.

Scenario: Practice within an enterprise

Context	The people working in the enterprise are developing competencies and skills by encountering new tasks and both facing and solving problems..
Possible problems	Good practices are not shared among the staff and the knowledge is developed but limited to the people involved
What could be done	Implement a system to simply codify and document the knowledge created (e.g. by "new knowledge maps") and the practices that have obtained the best results.
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A Quality approach (by means of agreed procedures and tools) can support the process of making readily available the enterprise knowledge and good practice patrimony. It would not need to be overcomplicated in order to stimulate involvement/participation.

Scenario: Training centre and guidance process for disadvantaged categories

Context	A training centre is designing a training course targeted at people belongings to disadvantaged categories.
Possible problems	In the guidance phase aimed at defining the individual learning paths, the potential learners do not have a "strong" educational background
What could be done	Introduce agreed procedures and methods to collect, document and recognise competencies and knowledge acquired outside the formal path.
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A quality approach (by means of agreed procedures and tools) can support the process of learner profiling and recognise/value their life background experiences so as to improve their self-esteem and design a relevant tailor-made learning path.

Scenario: MUSEUM: selection of didactic resources

Context	The museum designs didactical paths for schools
Possible problems	The resources available have different natures and quality. Museum staff do have not the same didactic competence, nor motivation to implement didactic paths.
What could be done	Define and introduce in the selection phase a set of criteria for assessing the quality of the resources from both technical and pedagogical points of view and select or train (if necessary) the staff accordingly.
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A quality approach (based on quality criteria) can assure final users with a relevant and effective learning path, with an option to document and improve on previous experiences.

Scenario: Museum and adaptation of resources.

Context	The museum has resources of varying different nature and didactic value.
Possible problems	The resources have an intrinsic value (from an historical, cultural, artistic point of view) but are not specifically designed for didactic purposes.
What could be done	Define and introduce in the adaptation process a set of criteria/instruction and guidelines for the museum staff.
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A quality approach can facilitate educational agencies and informal learning providers to convert or adapt their resource in to a learning resource format with an explicit and intentional didactic and pedagogical strategy and that also has characteristics specific to the context of informal learning. .

Scenario: NGO^{s} involving volunteers in international cooperation

Context	In this context there are few professionals and many volunteers providing a scenario where there is a need to increase the numbers of competent staff
Possible problems	Volunteers lack several competencies required to be fully effective in the working environments in which they are willing to operate
What could be done	Setting up a repository of learning resources, competence mapping and providing a structured(no matter how individualised) learning path for new volunteers which could be partially accessible at distance
How a quality approach would improve the situation	A quality approach can help document previous experience and allow learning take place from previous problems and solutions encountered.

ANNEX
ELEARNING AND TQM

1. A REVIEW OF THE APPROACHES

National, institutional and framework approaches, examples of TQM (Total Quality Management) application in large/comprehensive systems

This chapter of the Quality Guide intends to briefly introduce a number of TQM applications starting with international and framework approaches via national cases to institutional case studies. The content of the sub-chapters is derived from the quoted resources indicated under their titles.

1.1 EADL QUALITY GUIDE

2nd edition 2003, http://www.eadl.org/

The Quality Guide of EADL (European Association for Distance Learning) provides quality guidelines to safeguard standards and to maintain and improve the quality of courses and services in order to ensure the credibility of distance learning institutes.

The ***first version*** of the Quality Guide has been developed by ***SATURN***, a European association of distance teaching universities, industry and commerce, in equal partnership in 1992. This guide was constructed to highlight actions and processes involved in the provision of open and distance learning. It is based on a model defining 'key areas' which are focused on from the standpoints of different 'participant roles' (information providers, developers, deliverers, corporate customers and learners). For each of the key areas there is a 'checklist' listing appropriate 'action' in the form of 'checklist questions'. The idea was that the users, corporate customers and learners also must take responsibility for the quality in education.

The ***second version*** of the guide has been developed by the ***AECS*** (Association of European Correspondence Schools – predecessor of EADL) Research and Development Committee in 1994. The aims of the project was to: offer a sound base for quality assessment and improvement for private distance education institutions to give a satisfactory quality guarantee for distance education, especially for European small and medium sized enterprises to improve the status and image of private correspondence schools in Europe.
The AECS guide describes the relevant areas for distance education within each of the elements and defines how each area might be handled in the organisation. In this connection 4 stages or levels can be defined: (1) Short term orientation; (2) Formulated product requirements; (3) Effective use of internal expertise and (4) Continuous improvement and interaction with the environment.
This quality guide has been reviewed, updated and fine-tuned by EADL in 2003.

The ***last version*** aims at developing a quality management framework, which helps individual distance learning institutes to manage and improve quality using practical tools based on the principles of TQM and on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. The framework supports a systematic approach that allows the Quality Guide to be incorporated into the quality development practice in all kinds of individual distance learning institutes: big or small, specialised or broad-based, business to consumer or business to business or mixed.

Ideally this guide can be used when a quality team wants to learn about new means and tools for quality assessment and development, to improve the work processes. By using the EADL Quality Guide, a team can agree on a self-appraisal procedure and take or propose quality improvement measures.

The purposes of the EADL Quality Guide are to:

- provide a short introduction to quality and the Quality System in distance learning institutes.
- provide a tool to support quality team facilitators and members in carrying out quality self-appraisal procedures.
- take quality improvement measures in a systematic way, covering all relevant aspects.

The guide is discussing quality management in 3 chapters.

- Quality Guide: The basics
  In this chapter of the EADL Quality Guide, benefits, the basic system, the use of the model and quality improvement are described.
- The model for self-assessment
  The core of the EADL Quality Guide is describing in detail the system as a tool for quality assessment in 9 major sub-topics.
- From assessment to quality improvement
  This chapter suggests methods of improving quality, taking into consideration the results of the assessment carried out by following the steps in Chapter 2.

1.2 From External Control to Internal Quality Assurance (by NADE)

1993, http://www.nettskolen.com/forskning/17/tallinn.htm

The Norwegian Association for Distance Education (NADE) was established in 1968. Since then the organisation has played an active role in the development of distance education in Norway. NADE is a membership organisation, its members are both independent distance education institutions and other public and private institutions engaged in distance education, at all levels. NADE is a consultative and co-operating body for the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in matters concerning distance education.

Until 1993 the quality of private distance education was controlled externally by the government according to the Correspondence Education Act. From 1993 the main responsibility for quality improvement work lies with the institutions themselves, not regulated through strict supervision by the Ministry of Education. That time NADE was requested by the Ministry to prepare guidelines for quality standards in distance education. It was specified that the evaluation of quality ought to have a broad basis. The documents related to the bill expressed that quality assurance, follow-up and control should be concerned with the total educational programme.

NADE has established a ***Standing Committee on Quality***, which in co-operation with the member institutions and the Ministry developed the first version of quality standards. The quality standards are supposed to have an internal function to serve as guidelines for the institution's own quality improvement work.

Inspired by a report from ***Lund University in Sweden*** the Committee constructed a matrix of quality areas based on a two-dimensional model of distance education. The activities of a distance education institution were divided into four main *categories* and each of these main categories was again divided into four *phases*. These are combined in a matrix of 16 elements called *quality areas* (see Table 1).

	Conditions and Constraints	**Implementation**	**Results**	**Follow-up**
Information and Counselling	**1** External constraints Organisation Partners	**2** Channels Content	**3** Student body Other results	**4** Evaluation Customer relations
Course Development	**5** External constraints Organisation Target group Staff Partners	**6** Supervision, co-operation Follow-up and guidance of authors Choice of media Formative evaluation	**7** Course description Materials meeting requirements Teaching aids	**8** Evaluation Customer reactions Updating and/or revision
Course Delivery	**9** External constraints Organisation Students Materials Teachers Partners	**10** Two-way contact Teaching and guidance Exams and tests	**11** Students' achievements of goals Course completion Learning results	**12** Evaluation Customer reactions
Organisation	**13** External constraints Organisation Partners	**14** Management Communication Future orientation	**15** Achievement of goals Financial results Repute	**16** Evaluation Reporting

Table 1 Overview of Quality Areas and Quality Factors

For each of these quality areas certain factors were specified, which may enter into the institution's evaluation of its own quality. Relevant quality standards have then been formulated for each factor (with some few exceptions). The quality standards are grouped and numbered according to areas and factors in the matrix.
In a comprehensive evaluation of an institution's quality the extent to which the institution meets all of the quality standards that are relevant to its activities is a significant factor. A clear intention was that the standards are seen as recommendations for the institutions' self-evaluation, and not intended specifically for external judgement. However, in the Ministry's assessment in a process of accrediting new institutions for state funding, the quality standards were an important instrument.

1.3 THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (QAA): GUIDELINES ON THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

March 1999, http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/dlg/contents.htm

The practice of 'distance learning' has been developing and evolving in many different forms in recent years, so that the phrase is now routinely applied to a very wide spectrum of activities. Distance learning is increasingly being looked to by many institutions as an economical way of expanding their activities, widening opportunities for students around the world, and making effective use of the new technologies, which are rapidly emerging. The guidelines of QAA offer advice on assuring the quality and academic standards of higher education programmes of study provided through distance learning. They have been produced at the request of the distance learning community in the United Kingdom, which has recognised not only that the continued development of this form of higher education and its world-wide acceptance depend upon rigorous quality assurance, but also that there are many areas in which the usual ways of doing things for 'on-campus' provision are not necessarily appropriate in the context of distance learning.

The guidelines have been developed with the assistance of a working group initially convened in 1997 by the former ***Higher Education Quality Council*** (HEQC), and continued by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). They build on the generic Guidelines on quality assurance produced by the HEQC in 1996 and on institutional quality audit reports, undertaken in the first instance by the HEQC and latterly by QAA. In the preparation of the guidelines the working group has also drawn on advice from colleagues with an active involvement in, and experience of, a variety of forms of distance learning, and has taken into account existing guidelines and codes, both generic and specific to individual institutions.

The form, status and scope of the guidelines

As part of its development of a comprehensive quality assurance process for higher education, QAA is producing a Code of Practice for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the form of a series of self-contained sections covering the management of quality and standards in all teaching and learning activities.

Users of this publication are invited to offer their comments and opinions on the usefulness or otherwise of the guidelines, and on their coverage. Distance learning is approached in many different ways. These guidelines have not been designed to apply equally in all respects to every individual arrangement. They take a generic view based on underlying principles or precepts. They are concerned with arrangements made by UK universities and colleges to provide programmes of study by means of distance learning, whether in the UK or overseas. The guidelines focus on those aspects where the 'distance element' presents a special challenge to the assurance of quality of provision and the security of academic standards of programmes of study and awards. In these particular areas the guidelines build on principles which apply generally to higher education and relate those principles to distance learning provision. In other areas, guidance relating generally to higher education is equally applicable to provision through distance learning.

How the guidelines are structured

The *combined attention* to the *guidelines*, and to the more generally applicable *precepts and outline guidance* – that are described below – is intended to support total quality and effectiveness. The ***guidelines*** are arranged under six headings, each dealing with an aspect where quality assurance is likely to require attention in a particular way when study is none by distance learning:

- System design;
- Programme design, approval and review;
- The management of programme delivery;
- Student development and support;
- Student communication and representation;
- Student assessment.

Each section contains generic ***precepts and outline guidance***. The precepts identify those key matters which an institution might reasonably be expected to be able to demonstrate that it is addressing effectively through its own relevant quality assurance mechanisms. The purpose of the accompanying outline guidance is to offer suggestions on quality assurance and control which institutions can use, elaborate, and adapt according to their own needs, traditions, cultures and decision-making processes. In addition, a series of exemplifying questions were also collected to provide further prompts to the detailed consideration of matters covered by the precepts and outline guidance.

They are grouped by guideline and are formulated as a series of questions that an institution might wish to ask itself, before it establishes distance learning activities or as it considers and reviews its current arrangements.

2. WORLD BANK QUALITY APPROACHES

2.1 BERNADETTE ROBINSON: THE MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

1995, http://www1.worldbank.org/disted/Management/Governance/q-01.html

Procedures for ensuring quality can be ad hoc, piecemeal, unsystematic, too reliant on individual discretion, and standards of practice can be unnecessarily inconsistent and variable. In some cases, an institution's claims to quality fall to match the performance observed or experienced by those inside and outside of it (learners, tutors, course developers, despatch clerks, sponsors, professional bodies and policy-makers).

According to the initiative, a framework for managing quality in ODL has to accommodate all aspects of it, for example ***products***, ***services***, ***processes*** that support both products and services, and ***general philosophy***. The adoption of different approaches for managing quality (e.g. ***quality control***, ***quality assurance*** or ***total quality management***) should not begin and end with the procedural, the 'how to do it'. Key questions are:

- What goals and standards of quality are we seeking to achieve as an institution? What are our guiding values and principles?
- What do departments, sections and work groups need to do to align themselves with these goals?
- What procedures do we need to have in place?
- What criteria will we use to judge our achievements in quality?
- What evidence will we need to demonstrate our achievements?
- What mechanisms do we have for identifying and correcting poor quality?
- Who will be responsible?
- What do we need to do in order to operate a cycle of continuous improvement?

A framework for quality assurance

Although quality is improved incrementally, project by project, an institution needs an institution-wide framework for managing quality if it is to have impact. The following checklist attempts to map the areas that a quality assurance system would need to cover. It reflects practice and experience from higher education and training contexts in the UK, from fields other than education, and from my own work as editor of the ***SATURN European Guide to Quality in ODL***. It is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, and would need adapting to fit differing contexts of use.

- Quality policy and plan
- Identifying critical functions
- Specification of standards

- Involvement of users
- Staff involvement
- Documentation
- Training and staff development
- Monitoring
- Costs

(based on Robinson, 1994, pp. 187–188)

Instituting quality assurance: some guidelines

It is one thing to devise an institutional framework for quality assurance, it is another to have staff accept it, even though they may have contributed to its construction.

The following guidelines suggested by Barnett (and amended to fit ODL more closely) were designed to be relevant to higher education in the UK, and depict one way of instituting quality assurance.

a Give a senior respected manager responsibility for taking leadership in developing quality assurance and a realistic amount of time to do it.

b Provide opportunities for staff at all levels and in all locations, including regional and part-time staff, to participate in a real (not token) way to help shape the quality assurance system as it develops.

c Establish a cycle of review, with published timetable, covering all aspects and departments of an ODL organisation, including regional and part-time staff activities. Ensure communication about it throughout the organisation.

d Use trusted intermediaries to act as a channel of communication between central departments, regional units and senior managers in shaping the system.

e Involve students and staff at regional or local level in designing the system, and provide a means for their representation and advocacy at a senior level, including key committees and working groups.

f Set the whole initiative going with the help of a 'dynamic' group of interested and motivated staff, central and regional, who will help develop and disseminate the ideas, informally and formally, and contribute a variety of perspectives within an ODL institution.

g Give the key ideas exposure across the institution, ensuring that those in the field (students, tutors, local advisors and administrators) are included. Increase the flow of information and ideas between the field and the centre; ensure that it is a two-way flow.

h Disseminate good practice in improving quality and give publicity to progress and developments in quality assurance activities.

i Provide staff development, which is specifically linked to the goals of improving quality. Provide adequate resources for it. Encourage critical debate, facilitate the sharing of good practice and allow room for practitioner led staff development.

j Develop appropriate reward structures (including acknowledge of achievements) at all levels for staff who make a significant contribution to the development of quality assurance.

(based on Barnett, 1992, pp. 131–132)

Whatever approach to managing quality is adopted, all organisations need information to manage themselves effectively. Quality assurance requires that an institution is able to demonstrate knowledge and documentation about its own practices but it also needs information itself for its own functioning.

2.2 KARI LAMPIKOSKI: WHO DETERMINES QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION?

1995, http://www1.worldbank.org/disted/Management/Governance/q-02.html

Judgements about quality differ according to whose views are being sought. A traditional conclusion seems to be that quality means different things to different interest groups. Any distance education system incorporates many different elements and processes and the actual degree of importance given to these varying components depends upon which interest group is going to interpret quality. International standards (ISO 9000-04) have created a new approach to quality in distance education. In the ISO system external controllers examine and interpret the quality of a distance education system (an institute) by means of documentation and guidelines.

A Comparative Study

The majority of studies concerning quality in distance education have focused on perception of quality among separate interest groups, such as the students or the management. Nunan (1991) draws attention to the ways in which different factors mentioned in research studies may be combined in the debate on quality in distance education. The question was whether the management and educational staff are able to understand what their customers, the students (as users and payers of their educational services), really think about quality in distance education. Is the management and educational staff able to draw the same conclusions about the relative importance of various quality components in distance education? Do they attach the same satisfaction standards to the present quality as the students? Where does the discrepancy lie in their relative assessment of the present quality?
The author attempted to answer these questions with the help of the survey results of the ***AECS Quality Guide project***. The principal objective of the survey was to provide basic information for the AECS Quality Guide project by collecting and analysing data about quality perceptions and preferences among managers, teachers and students.

3. ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

3.1 THE BRITISH LEARNING ASSOCIATION QUALITY MARK

http://www.baol.co.uk/qmaccred.htm

The Association's Quality Mark provides a Quality Assurance system using internal self assessment and external verification of those providing products and services for open and flexible learning. It is based on a framework of criteria adapted from the Business Excellence Model promoted by the British Quality Foundation (BQF) and cross referenced against established Open Learning Guides so as to be relevant to all aspects of open learning provision and use.

The QM guide provides an account of the development, implementation and use of the Quality Mark illustrated by examples of its successful application in a number of different organisations. Organisations will self assess against the below criteria to identify the way in which they meet the guidelines and other areas where improvements in performance are necessary.

- Learning Centres
- Advice & Guidance
- Learner Support
- Materials Development

When they are confident that they meet the criteria and can demonstrate a consistent approach they can apply for external verification of this assessment. If they are successful the Association will award the Quality Mark for the categories assessed and the organisation will be able to display the Mark for 3 years.

The Quality Mark provides a visible recognition of those organisations which commit to the achievement of best practice criteria for each of the categories so that customers, clients and individual learners can identify providers committed to a quality product and service.

For organisations with Learning Centres and providing support to learners, the Quality Mark will:

- demonstrate to their learners the quality of the service through the Quality Mark Customer Charter
- show that the provision is externally accredited
- provide a means of benchmarking the activity against best practice criteria
- identify areas for performance improvement
- show that the provision is externally recognised.

For providers of open learning materials and products, the Quality Mark will:

- demonstrate to customers that materials have been produced to established guidelines
- show that the organisation is committed to quality provision
- provide a means of benchmarking activities against best practice criteria
- identify areas for improvements in performance
- indicate commitment to high standards of customer service through the Customer Charter.

For providers, clients, customers and learners the Quality Mark establishes standards of good practice across open and flexible learning activities and recognition of commitment to and achievement of quality.

3.2 AMERICAN CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

http://www.ed.psu.edu/acsde/deos/deosnews/deosnews13_2.asp

Penn State's American Center for the Study of Distance Education (ACSDE) was founded in 1986 to study and disseminate information about distance education in all its forms. As the first center of its kind in the United States, ACSDE has helped to shape distance education practice through its publications, research symposia, leadership institutes, and moderated listserv.

The mission of the American Center for the Study of Distance Education is to help educators meet the challenges of an educational environment significantly influenced by new technologies and the innovative pedagogical approaches they support. ACSDE is committed to serving the educational community by:

- conducting empirical research that adds to the educational knowledge base on the impact and value of new forms of teaching and learning through empirical research and evaluation studies that focus on a variety of areas including student outcomes, faculty outcomes, institutional impact and change management, and quality control.
- disseminating research- and practice-based knowledge about distance teaching and learning through publications and professional development activities. Many faculty members and other professional educational staff are being challenged to develop new skills and knowledge necessary for success in managing or teaching in technology-based educational environments. ACSDE helps educators meet this challenge by providing resources and development activities focused on effective practices in a variety of contexts.
- providing distance education program evaluation services to academic units and external partners
- providing opportunities for graduate students to gain research and or/practical experience related to distance education.

The Center's initiatives are the following:

- Research: ACSDE conducts externally funded studies of the impact of using technology to deliver educational programming. The Center's research agenda and strategy brings together faculty at Penn State and other institutions across disciplines to study important distance education issues and emerging practices.
- Professional Development Activities: ACSDE will provide on-site presentations or workshops to groups and institutions on a variety of topics including the effectiveness of distance education, faculty development, student support, and organizational planning and change.
- Publications: ACSDE publishes materials on relevant topics submitted to the Center as well as reports based on the Center's own projects. Two long-standing publications—DEOSNEWS, a peer-reviewed online journal, and DEOS-L, a moderated listserv—provide the educational community with information and dialogue related to the practice of distance education in a variety of contexts.

Evaluation: ACSDE offers evaluation services to departments or organizations wishing to assess the impact of distance education initiatives.

3.3 Dheeraj Mehrotra: Applying Total Quality Management in Academics

http://www.isixsigma.com/library/content/c020626a.asp

Dheeraj Mehrotra is a freelance journalist of information technology and quality related issues in academics. His study is about how W. Edwards Deming's concept of TQM is applicable to academics based on John Jay Bonstingl's article, "The Quality Revolution in Education" where he outlines the TQM principles he believes are most salient to education reform. These are the Four Pillars of Total Quality Management:

- ***Principle #1: Synergistic Relationships***
  This principle shows that in an organization everyone is both a customer and a supplier which emphasizes the essentiality of teamwork and collaboration, involving the teachers, the students and the educational institution itself. The product of their successful work together is the development of the student's capabilities, interests, and character.
- ***Principle #2: Continuous Improvement and Self Evaluation***
  This pillar of win-win approach is about encouraging everyone's potential by dedicating ourselves to the continual improvement of our own abilities and those of the people with whom we work and live.
  According to Deming, no human being should ever evaluate another human being. Therefore, TQM emphasizes self-evaluation as part of a continuous improvement process. In addition, this principle also laminates to the focusing on students' strengths, individual learning styles, and different types of intelligence.

- ***Principle #3: A System of Ongoing Process***
  The organization is viewed as a system and the work done within the organization must be seen as an ongoing process. Failure is not the result of the individuals' flaws rather than the flaws of the process that allows its participants to fail. That is what has to be examined through quality management. Since systems are made up of processes, the improvements made in the quality of those processes largely determine the quality of the resulting product. In the new paradigm of learning, continual improvement of learning processes based on learning outcomes replaces the outdated "teach and test" mode.

- ***Principle #4: Leadership***
  The responsibility of top management. The school teachers must establish the context in which students can best achieve their potential through the continuous improvement that results from teachers and students working together. Teachers who emphasize content area literacy and principle-centered teaching provide the leadership, framework, and tools necessary for continuous improvement in the learning process.
  According to the practical evidences, the TQM principles help the schools in following clauses:
  a) Redefine the role, purpose and responsibilities of schools.
  b) Improve schools as a "way of life".
  c) Plan comprehensive leadership training for educators at all levels.
  d) Create staff development that addresses the attitudes and beliefs of school staff.
  e) Use research and practice-based information to guide both policy and practice.
  f) Design comprehensive child-development initiatives that cut across a variety of agencies and institutions.
  Participatory management among well-trained and educated partners is crucial to the success of TQM in education; everyone involved must understand and believe in principles. Some personnel who are committed to the principles can facilitate success with TQM. Their vision and skills in leadership, management, interpersonal communication, problem solving and creative cooperation are important qualities for successful implementation of TQM.

3.4 Prof. Dr. Maria Cristina L. V. Mendonça, Universidade Aberta, Lisboa, Portugal: Teaching and Learning in a Networked World: A Quality Approach to Open Learning in Higher Education

http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ICDE/proceedings/poster/mendonca.html

The public rapidly gained access to new and dramatically faster communication technologies. Nowadays the problem is not information access but information overload. The real value produced by an information provider comes in locating, filtering, and communicating what is useful to the consumer. Competition can be based on the filed of quality.

The author believes that the adoption of the principles associated with Total Quality Management will help create a future for higher education. It is also appropriate to apply Total Quality to ODL, because Total Quality emphasizes principles that are firmly enshrined in the halls of the academia. These include an emphasis on knowledge and education, experimentation and management by fact, continuous improvement, and respect for and the ongoing development of people.

Total Quality Management (TQM) goes beyond the traditional idea of quality, which has been expressed as the degree of conformance to a standard. The quality is the degree of user satisfaction or the fitness of the product for use. The customer determines whether or not quality has been achieved in its totality. TQM is much more than delegation, it also requires teamwork, focused training, and extensive use of data. It is crucial to compete in today's global economy.
If the organizations opt for quality, they will need a better- qualified work force. In that case, educators must make the commitment to quality. Practices that violate quality principles include setting quantitative goals and quotas, teaching obsolete curriculum, using norm-referenced testing, and grading students competitively.

In education, practices in harmony with the quality movement include site-based decision making, quality circles, outcome-based education, team teaching, action research by teachers, cooperative learning, and teaching thinking. Quality Assurance on high schools in a rapidly and radically changing world is an issue arising from the long-standing debate among teachers, parents and industrialists.

3.5 International Perspectives on Quality Assurance: Lessons for South Africa

http://education.pwv.gov.za/teli2/policydocuments/distance4.htm

The paper highlights current international trends in distance education which are relevant to the South Africa context. It then looks at various methods of quality assurance which have been used internationally, discusses their advantages and limitations, and points to a trend from external control to internal quality assurance. Thirdly, it analyses three sets of quality guidelines in terms of their usefulness for South Africa. Finally, by reflecting on the similarities and differences between distance education provision in South Africa and internationally, it draws out some of the lessons from international experience which are most relevant to the country.

Research conducted by the Research Group into quality assurance strategies has demonstrated a clear trend from external control to internal quality assurance, as the descriptions below will demonstrate.

The Law of the Market

A first phase of quality assurance has been to rely on the law of the market to improve the quality of distance education provision. This idealistic approach is based on the logic that students will gravitate towards those programmes which are of the highest quality. However, in the first phase of distance education provision - the correspondence school phase - it quickly became apparent that it was not sufficient to trust to the market to ensure credibility and quality control.

Associations and Codes of Ethics

While they remain an important element in quality assurance, the success of associations and their codes of ethics depends very much on the energy and vision of the participants. They also contain the associated risk of being used by participants as a gate-keeping mechanism to prevent competitors from successfully entering the field. Thus, they might be regarded as a necessary, but not sufficient, element in assuring quality.

Accreditation

Even though some Associations have been strict about adherence to a Code of Ethics, the tendency has been for member institutions to wear their membership to Associations like a badge and not to use it for real quality control. A firmer way to ensure quality is, therefore, to offer accreditation.

Legislation

Some attempts at firm control, particularly of private distance education institutions, have resulted in regulation by law. It definitely results in the removal of certain substandard activities, but, through its necessary insistence only on minimum standards, it can also lead to the legislation of mediocrity. Another disadvantage is that changes in legislation are slow. Thus, they often cannot keep up with rapid changes in pedagogical attitudes and approaches to quality appraisal.
On the above basis the author evaluates the following topics:

- Quality Standards and Total Quality Management
- Quality Assessment and Quality Audit
- From External Quality Control to Internal Quality Assurance
- and offers two case studies:
- The Case of Norway
- The United Kingdom Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education

Than the author gives a detailed description of international quality guidelines for distance education in the light of their usefulness for the South Africa context. These guidelines are the following:

- AECS Quality Guidelines
- NADE's Quality Standards for Distance Education
- Guidelines on Quality Assurance 1994 of the Higher Education Quality Council (United Kingdom)

WEB REFERENCE LIST TO THE ANNEX:

- http://www.eadl.org
- http://www.nettskolen.com/forskning/17/tallinn.htm
- http://www.nettskolen.com/pub/artikkel.xsql?artid=140
- http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/dlg/contents.htm
- http://www1.worldbank.org/disted/Management/Governance/q-01.html
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