

SHARING PRACTICE IN ENSURING AND ENHANCING QUALITY (SPEAQ)

About SPEAQ

Under the Lifelong Learning Programme, we have been funded to connect three key quality circles (teacher, student and quality manager) in order to share and enhance quality assurance practice in higher education. This project sets out to address the concern that quality assurance can become ritualised rather than embedded in learning and teaching practice. The outcomes from this project will generate new ideas on how to approach quality assurance within the institution providing evidence of how bringing together stakeholders in the quality process can lead to a wider and more meaningful interpretation of quality assurance.

We are collecting views on quality assurance from different stakeholders and we are undertaking projects in our own institutions which will explore ways in which a more shared vision of quality assurance can be fostered at institutional and disciplinary level. SPEAQ is building on the work of LanQua (Language Network for Quality Assurance) which explored issues of quality in the context of the discipline of languages. It developed a toolkit (The LanQua Toolkit) to support frontline academic and academic support staff in conceptualising and describing quality from their practice perspective.

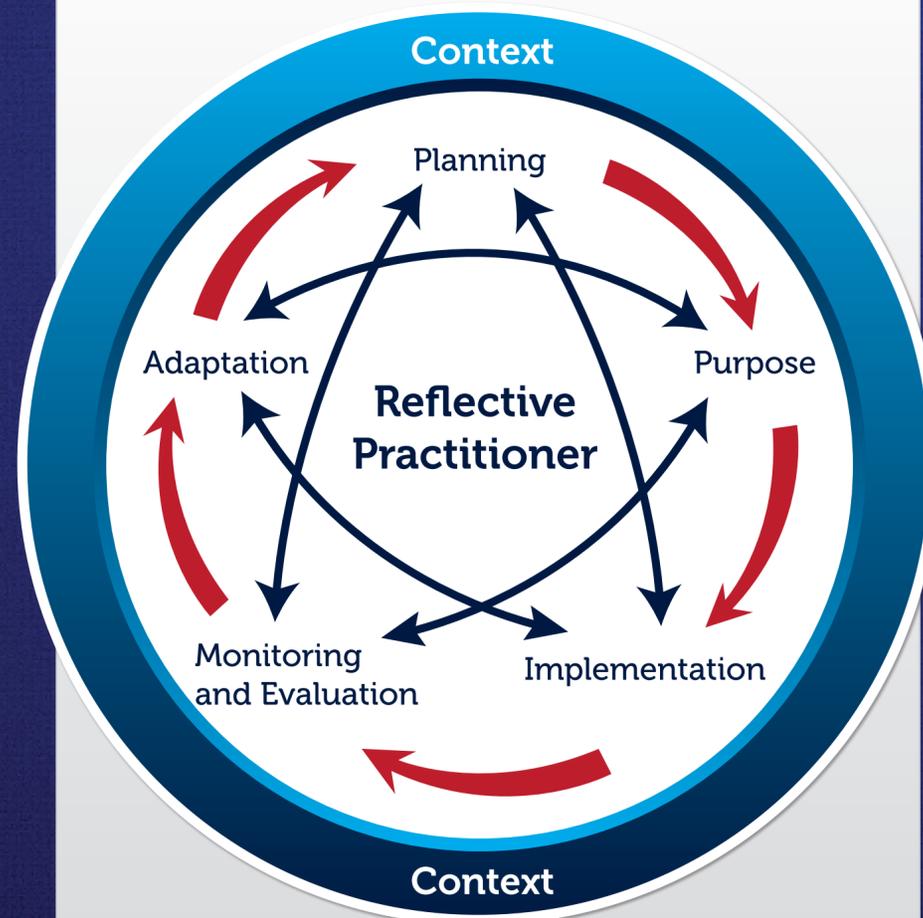
An interactive workshop

We have developed an interactive workshop which is a useful way of encouraging discussion among teaching staff, quality staff and students. Participants are encouraged to explore quality from a number of perspectives. It has clearly stimulated thinking about quality and feedback has shown that participants appreciated being given the opportunity to explore quality in this way (from their own perspective) and responses from students have been particularly enthusiastic. Some students were surprised to be asked about what they contribute to quality as they more usually think of themselves as consumers (receivers of quality) rather than having a role to play within it.

The workshop uses a dialogue sheet. This tool provides a focus for discussion with participants being asked to consider what questions they might ask to evaluate the quality of a number of everyday items and services. They are then asked to reconsider their questions in the context of higher education and decide on a set of questions which are useful for the purpose of evaluating quality in education. They are then encouraged to think about which questions might relate to their own experiences as student, teacher or administrator and discuss how they might answer them from their own perspective.

This helps to revitalise quality and to show that all participants have a role to play in quality assurance and enhancement and how similar or different these roles might be.

The LanQua Quality Model



The Quality Model was developed by LanQua to guide practice and reflection on practice, in order to enhance the quality of the learning experience for those engaged in the learning and teaching of languages. It approaches quality from a teacher and learner perspective and supports a bottom-up view of quality assurance which is based in practice and which has a mainly enhancement function that can work alongside and complement other more formal internal and external quality assurance processes in higher education institutions.

To learn about LanQua visit <http://www.lanqua.eu/>

For more information about SPEAQ,
please visit our project website at

www.speaq-project.eu

or contact Laurence Georjin, SPEAQ Project Manager,
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Three views on quality

1

Quality Managers

Unlike other groups of participants QM's brought up the question of internal processes as well as questioning the quality of the final product. Internal quality processes are not considered or addressed unless a problem emerges which gives cause for an end user (or his/her representatives) to question internal quality processes. They also questioned the durability of a product: a sofa may seem to be good quality at the point of purchase, but what happens if it falls apart a year later? Is an academic course durable? What if it fails after purchase, e.g. during the course or after graduation, despite seeming perfectly adequate for a length of time? They also asked if poor teaching quality is a quality issue?

Whilst the obvious answer is 'yes', responsibilities for bringing poor performers up to standard usually lies with senior academics (Heads of Departments, Deans etc.), not quality assurance managers.

2

Students

Students were invited to respond to a number of questions relating to their learning experience, their understanding of the concept of quality in higher education and their influence (voice) in the quality process. A set of questions were designed to encourage positive comments rather than complaints:

- What is the most rewarding learning experience you have had on your programme/course and why?
- What makes your experience as a student a valuable one?
- Do you have a voice within your university? Are you listened to? If so, how is your opinion heard/acted upon? Where is your voice heard? By whom?
- What can you contribute to enhancing the learning experience?
- Who are the quality managers in your institution?

3

Academic Staff

The project team held focus groups with teaching teams within their institutions. Despite coming from eight different countries, there was agreement among teachers on many characteristics of a study programme, department or institution, e.g. student teacher ratios, number of qualified staff, structured and coherent programmes, adequate QA mechanisms, student involvement, employability rates, success and drop-out rates, etc. There was also commonality regarding teachers' perceptions of what would ensure a better quality learning experience. These included:

- Attracting better prepared and more motivated students
- Providing structured learning environments tailored to the needs of groups of students
- Giving value to teaching and teachers
- Using feedback from quality assurance constructively
- Organising resources in such a way as to enable teamwork, dialogue and discussion involving teachers and students

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Student involvement in quality procedures: learning it by doing.

This project focuses on teaching students about the complexity of quality assurance in higher education. The aims of the project are for the students:

- to develop skills in managing projects
- to develop transferable skills in quality assurance practices and procedures
- to develop their skills in effective communication, working in teams, working on their own, analysing, systematizing, reporting etc.
- to demonstrate the usefulness of follow-up quality assessment for the sustainability of project outcomes
- to implement the practice of a more systematic and efficient cooperation between the three quality circles at the University of Szeged



Sharing Practice in Assuring Quality

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Peer-to-peer student mentoring programme for the Applied Modern Languages Department, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania

The Babes-Bolyai University, through its Department of Applied Modern Languages, is implementing a pilot project targeted at first year students during their induction period. It aims to set up a peer-to-peer student mentoring programme/system, involving second year undergraduate students as mentors and first year undergraduate students as mentees.

The key objective is to help first year students adjust to the challenges of university life by facilitating closer interaction with other students who have already gone through similar experiences. The project is designed with input from teacher-tutors and administrative staff to ensure that the information conveyed is consistent and in line with university/faculty/departement regulations.

Enhancing the quality of study programmes through interaction of the three quality circles.

Our project relates to Modern Language students' participation in enhancing the quality of their own degree. However, we believe the project can be applied to any other degree within the university. The aims of this project are:

- to study the interaction between the quality circles
- look into the various quality dimensions emerging from the students and other stakeholders' feedback questionnaires
- compare quality questionnaires from different stakeholders and see quality uncovered/neglected aspects in each
- promote 'alternate systems' in which students are more actively involved in internal quality assurance procedures
- propose timelines of action and revision so that degrees meet the changing needs of students and society

Re-engineering course evaluation methodology and procedures.

Electronic, systematic, questionnaire-based student evaluations of all courses, of curriculum and of teachers' performance have been a standard procedure at CBS for a number of years. Under the Danish University Act these are the responsibility of Study Boards with a 50/50% representation of mentors and first year undergraduate students prepared by an evaluation unit of each term's student evaluations and are required to take action on results. However, there is a tendency for such questionnaire-based evaluations to become stale, and response rates are low. In order for such evaluations not to become more ritual than actual useful feedback, this project will engage students, faculty and quality managers in discussions, idea generation and piloting of alternative (and hopefully innovative) methods to supplement or replace the existing methodology.

Enhancing pedagogical and interactive skills of non-native content teachers teaching through English.

The project will be implemented within the staff development programme in *Teaching Academic Content through English* (TACE). Both Finnish and international subject specialists can take TACE, share practice, and carry out individual development projects.

We aim to:

- establish informed and effective reflective practices related to teaching and learning through a foreign language
- address staff concerns about skills in dealing with intercultural and multilingual student groups
- address student concerns about the expertise of their teachers in cases where non-native speaker issues are evident in the language of instruction
- share the responsibility for quality outcomes and thus promote the internationalization of our university

The international students' voice: can it make a difference?

This project aims to enhance the learning experience of international students at the University through formal and informal quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms. We aim to do this by:

- producing study guidelines for international students to promote swifter and improved integration into the new learning context
 - inviting and, wherever possible, acting upon suggestions regarding all aspects of the learning experience including information/communication channels, student support and services, formal and informal quality assurance channels and processes and classroom learning
 - helping shape policy decisions regarding international students/internationalisation
- By enhancing the learning experience of international students, it is hoped that the home students will also benefit from any changes introduced.

FORUM SPEAQA.

University of Aveiro, Portugal

We will create a forum for the discussion of quality issues related to the enhancement of teaching and learning on an institutional (policy) level and a practical level. This forum will involve representatives of the three quality circles (students, teachers and quality managers) and promote dialogue about key issues which emerged from Year 1 of the SPEAQ project.

We will:

- promote the open discussion of quality issues between different institutional actors
- clarify each actor's roles and responsibilities in the teaching/learning process
- find common ground for institutional and practical quality procedures
- strengthen the sense of shared responsibility and empowerment of the various institutional actors
- increase awareness and provide resources and examples of practices which enhance quality in the institution

Enhancing collaboration procedures within the Middle Languages Didactics (IMoF).

The project will focus on enhancing quality through professional co-operations in the areas of assessment and cross-curricular networking. Collaboration between IMoF staff on teaching and assessment has been well-established over the past decade and has contributed to the high quality and reputation of the department. However, within the Middle Module, due to the variety of courses and staff on external contracts, collaborations are not so well developed.

Thus, the two-fold focus will be on:

- professional co-operation in the area of assessment
 - a structured link between languages and science didactics within the School of Education
- The School of Education was only founded at the beginning of the academic year 2012-13, and a focus on professional co-operations will be a very good opportunity to move forward.

Developing resources for improving the quality of feedback.

University of Southampton, UK

We will produce informative resources which can be delivered online and in workshop format which approach issues of feedback in practical, clear and meaningful ways illustrated with real examples.

We will:

- examine current methods for giving and receiving student feedback at the university (illustrated by case studies of what is already being done successfully by some teachers, quality managers and students)
- provide activities which encourage reflection on how staff and students can improve the ways in which feedback is delivered, received, and reported
- provide clear explanations of quality assurance processes and mechanisms at the University and how these relate to the feedback given and received by student