

Guidance Notes: setting up and managing a quality project

About SPEAQ

The Sharing Practice in Enhancing and Assuring Quality Project was a partnership of 10 institutions (9 universities and the European Students Union) which set out to understand how quality in higher education is viewed and practised by three main stakeholder groups: students, academics and quality managers with a view to developing strategies for connecting these three 'quality circles' and improving quality culture within the partner institutions. These findings are now being shared with the wider Higher Education community across Europe in the form of reports and practical tools created by the project team.

This project draws on the work of a previous project, the Language Network for Quality Assurance (LanQua) Project which looked at quality in the context of one discipline across a network of 60 European partners. This project asked participants to reflect on what they did in the planning and delivery of their teaching in order to elicit a model for good practice which could be used by other teachers to think about how they could assure and enhance the quality of their teaching. Taking a bottom-up approach to quality, the project provided support for teachers in seeing how they could meaningful links between quality assurance and enhancement processes within their own academic and teaching practice. A key outcome of this project was a Quality Model (www.lanqua.eu) which graphically describes the quality process for practitioners and which formed the basis of the activities of SPEAQ. This project has extended this methodology to other colleagues, disciplines and members of the university community in order to transfer the insights gained into concrete actions which would help advance the quality enhancement agenda within universities in the European Higher Education Area.

These actions were as follows:

- To collect stakeholder views on quality
- To engage in concrete actions involving these stakeholders
- To provide tools for reflection based on and extending the LanQua Quality Model

This guide is concerned with the second of these actions and includes notes on organising, managing and evaluating an institutional quality project, a set of example projects and a planning/reporting template.

Information and reports from the project can be found in English, French, German and Spanish at www.speaq-project.eu/

What do we mean by a quality project?

In the context of SPEAQ the purpose of the quality projects was to engage in activities which would follow-up on or address issues raised by the data collection exercise (see *Guidance Notes: collecting stakeholder views on quality*). These projects, of which some exemplars are listed below, were intended to be highly practical in nature and also to operate as much at grassroots level as possible in order to engage closely with one or more of the quality circles: students, academic staff and quality managers. The main objective for projects was quality or practice enhancement but it was expected that they should be brought to the attention of, and potentially influence, senior managers in the institutions, and initiate positive improvements in institutional quality culture.

Projects carried out during SPEAQ fell into the following main areas of activity:

Engaging students with quality issues

➤ **Example 1: The international student's voice: can it make a difference? University of Trento, Italy**

This project had the overarching aim of improving the integration and experience of international students and thereby improving that of local students. It operated on two different levels, both formal and informal, and included quality Assurance and quality enhancement processes.

On the formal level the project focused on the actions, effectiveness and impact of the newly instituted School of International Studies (SIS) Student-Teacher Committee (Commissione Paritetico), which, as a result of the project, counted the very first international student representative at the University of Trento among its members. The actions of this Committee impact directly on the learning experience of all students in the School.

On the informal level, a series of workshops for international and local students were initiated to discuss the needs of international students arriving at the University which informed a series of student-led projects which produced a number of concrete outcomes, such as an information website for international students, a Facebook group and student blog. These outcomes have been presented at a more formal level to other stakeholders (academic staff and administrators) and have made an impact at senior management level.

➤ **Example 2: Peer-to-peer student mentoring programme for the Applied Modern Languages Department. Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania**

This project was targeted at first year students and their induction period. It 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 was 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.

➤ **Example 3: Student involvement in quality procedures: learning it by doing. Szeged University, Hungary**

This project focused on creating a task to teach students about the complexity of quality assurance in higher education by building it into one of their modules. It was developed to support more inclusive and innovative approaches to learning and to quality processes and addressed a need to involve students more closely in quality assurance. The students were given a real-world task to complete which involved evaluating the outcomes of a pedagogic project which had already been evaluated, but without student input. They were introduced to quality issues via a series of lectures and seminars, then tasked with designing questionnaires and analysing the results. In so doing they were not only engaging directly in quality practice but also developing project management skills.

Sharing good practice

➤ **Example 1: FORUM SPEAQUA. University of Aveiro, Portugal**

The goal of this project was to create a forum for the discussion of quality issues related to the enhancement of teaching and learning on both an institutional (policy) level and a practice-based (pedagogic) level. The forum involved a series of work sessions with representatives of the three quality circles (students, teachers and quality managers) and promoted dialogue about key issues which had emerged from the first year of the SPEAQ project. The participants identified and discussed these issues, made concrete proposals for quality enhancement and disseminated their results among colleagues, in their departments and on the institutional web page. Altogether 5 meetings or workshop sessions were held and an online forum was set up for interim and thematic discussions.

This project was based on the belief that there is a need in the institution for space for teachers and students to come together and talk about what worries and concerns them, in informal and minimally structured settings, and that such discussions can lead to engagement with quality issues and, in the medium and the long term, to real change. This group continues to meet.

➤ **Example 2: Developing resources for improving the quality of feedback. University of Southampton, UK**

The objective of this project was to produce and disseminate informative resources delivered online. These resources were relevant for use in professional development workshops but also for students and quality staff. The materials, presented in the form of a website approach issues of feedback in practical, clear and meaningful ways illustrated with real examples. These include good practice examples for giving and receiving student feedback at the university, a brief survey of the literature on feedback in higher education teaching, activities (games and quizzes) to stimulate discussion among staff and students and explanations of University quality assurance processes and how these relate to feedback.

➤ **Example 3: Enhancing collaboration procedures within the Middle Module at the Department for Languages Didactics (IMoF). Innsbruck University, Austria**

This project set out to address a very specific issue identified by staff at the University of Innsbruck, relating to lack of collaboration on assessment tasks and criteria on a teacher education “Middle Module” and also to transfer the collaborative approach to colleagues in other disciplines. Its main objectives were:

- To create a transparent framework for assessment of Middle Module courses
- To establish a framework for co-operation in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) between language & natural science teacher educators

Improving feedback mechanisms

➤ **Example 1: Enhancing the quality of study programmes through interaction of the three quality circles. University of Deusto, Spain**

A central aim of this project was to explore additional and more engaging ways of collecting student feedback. This included the comparison of the official 'quality questionnaire' which is uniform for all students with the questions students felt were important when it comes to evaluating and enhancing the quality of their degree programme.

The following activities were carried out:

- Analysis of the dimensions of quality covered in the official questionnaires sent to the different stakeholders by the Quality Unit
- Creation of a student feedback questionnaire developed by and for students
- Comparison of the official questionnaires with the student questionnaires
- Meetings with student representatives, teachers and quality managers to discuss the findings of the project

➤ **Example 2: Re-engineering course evaluation methodology and procedures. Copenhagen Business School, Denmark**

Copenhagen Business School has operated a comprehensive quality assurance system for several years, which includes systematic use of electronic questionnaire-based student evaluations of all courses. These evaluations are run by an Evaluation Unit which communicates the results to the course teachers and to the academic directors in charge of study programmes. However, it has been felt, not least among students, that these evaluations have become increasingly unfit for purpose, because they tend to become 'too routine' without proper feedback on the results to students and insufficient implementation of development/innovation opportunities. The SPEAQ project used tools and insights from the project and the LanQua Quality model to contribute ideas to the on-going debates and review of this system and to try to increase the focus on engaging with all three quality circles when collecting and following-up on student feedback.

Professional development

➤ **Example 1: Enhancing pedagogical and interactive skills of non-native content teachers teaching through English. University of Jyväskylä, Finland**

This project was implemented within the staff development programme in Teaching Academic Content through English (TACE), which is one option in the overall university pedagogical qualifications required from teaching staff at the University of Jyväskylä.

A section of the TACE programme was selected for the SPEAQ project and covered the four last months (January - April 2013) of the programme which had started in May 2012. This section included the development of an individual reflective teaching portfolio comprising a description of individual teaching philosophy, course planning and course evaluation of by teacher and students. A final report was submitted which was presented with the LanQua Toolkit framework.

Full details of the projects outlined here can be found at www.speaq-project.eu/

Quality Project Implementation Plan

Project Rationale

Title of project	
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Summary

<i>What are you trying to do?</i>

Background/Context

<i>Why are you trying to do it?</i>
<i>What need(s) does it answer?</i>

Objectives

<i>What are you aiming to achieve?</i>
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Risks/Specific considerations

<i>What specific issues must you consider?</i>
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Quality Assurance

<i>Why is it a quality assurance/enhancement issue?</i>
<i>How does it feed into the quality loop/circle?</i>
<i>Does it have the potential to improve institutional quality culture?</i>

Project Plan

Activities

How are you going to do it?

Participants

Who will be involved & how will they be involved?

Anticipated Results

What are you hoping to achieve? [What will be left at the end?]

What evidence will have been produced? [How will you demonstrate you have done it?]

Monitoring/Evaluation

How will you know it works?

How can you measure the impact?

How will you be able to improve it?

Dissemination

How will you make your initiative known?

Potential for continuation/multiplication

Is the initiative sustainable?

Can the project be (further) exploited in your institution, at other levels, or in other national/European institutions?

Workplan

Activities	Participants	Deadlines	Measurable outcomes

Impact

Who does it impact on?

- Admin staff
- Teaching staff
- Students
- QA managers
- Other stakeholders (please specify)

At what level does it impact?

- Institution
- Faculty
- Department
- Programme
- Course
- Other (please specify)

What does it impact on? [Please tick below]

	Policy	Practice
General management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evaluating impact?

<i>What impact measures will you use?</i>
<i>How will you report impact?</i>
<i>To whom will you report impact (internally and externally)?</i>
<i>Are there any potential wider benefits (beyond your department/institution)?</i>

Quality Project Report

Institution	
Institution coordinator	
Title of project	

Summary

Provide a short description of the project.

Background/Context

Why was this project chosen for implementation (out of the potential projects initiatives identified by your institution in the SPEAQ first year activities)?

What immediate needs did the project answer?

Objectives

Indicate aims (as bullets).

Were the objectives set achieved? If not, why not?

Actions/Activities

Describe the actions completed and provide photos from any of the activities, if available.

Choose one activity and detail as an illustrative case study/example of the work carried out in the institution.

Did you cover all activities planned for? If not, why not and where are you at? Are there intentions to complete the activities not covered in the future?

Please provide a summary of the feedback regarding the activities from the stakeholders participating in your partner project

Deliverables

*Describe the deliverables produced, i.e. podcasts, worksheets, blogs, wikis, interactive quizzes etc. (and provide as annex).
Include the list of deliverables you are annexing.*

Were the deliverables anticipated achieved? If not, why not.

Please provide a summary of the feedback regarding the deliverables from the stakeholders participating in your partner project.

Impact

<i>Describe the impact the project has had.</i>
<i>Did the project have the impact envisaged? If not, why not.</i>
<i>Please provide a summary of the feedback regarding the impact from the stakeholders participating in your partner project.</i>

Monitoring and evaluation

<i>Describe ways you evaluated the activities and the outcomes.</i>
<i>How did the project address the quality assurance agenda of your institution?</i>
<i>How did the project connect the three quality circles and with what effect?</i>
<i>What were the major difficulties encountered?</i>
<i>What kinds of constraints or impositions affected the implementation, if any?</i>

Dissemination

<i>Describe dissemination methods applied/envisaged and provide photos from any dissemination events, if available.</i>
<i>Please provide a summary of the feedback regarding the dissemination from the stakeholders participating in your partner project.</i>

Continuation/multiplication/exploitation

<i>Describe continuation/multiplication/exploitation plan, if appropriate.</i>
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Collecting participant feedback on projects

The following questions are to help you elicit information from project participants on their (changing) perceptions of quality and the impact of your project on the quality culture in your own institution/department/course.

These are formulated as questions, but you are free to formulate the issues/questions in the most appropriate way especially where you think students might not be familiar with terminology. It would be helpful also to explain the term 'Quality Culture'.

1. Has taking part in this project (or provide name of YOUR project) changed your view of how your institution/department/course addresses regarding the quality of your whole learning experience and more in general on how quality issues are addressed in your institution? In what way?
2. Has taking part in this project changed how you view **your** role in improving the educational experience / the way improvements are introduced/ how quality is ensured in your institution? If so, how?
3. Do you think there is a strong Quality Culture in your institution (where all actors are actively engaged in processes and dialogue both with peers and between stakeholder groups is encouraged)? Why do you think this?
4. What impact (if any) do you think this project has had on the Quality Culture (i.e. how quality and quality issues are viewed and addressed) in your institution/department/course?
5. Which stakeholder group(s) do you think has/have the most important role to playing fostering a Quality Culture in your institution?
 - Quality Managers
 - Administrative staff (responsible for implementing policy)
 - Teaching Staff
 - Students
6. What kinds of actions and/or policies regarding quality (QA&QE) do you think are most effective in fostering a Quality Culture and as a consequence drive change/enhance the educational experience in your institution?
7. Place the following in order of most impact starting with the most effective action
 - Formal policy which outlines quality targets
 - Formal processes which measure quality
 - Formal processes which encourage dialogue (e.g. Study Board meetings with students, Student-Teacher committees, student representation)
 - Semi-formal actions which encourage dialogue (e.g. Open Forums, workshops etc)
 - On the ground, grass-roots initiatives at the level of individual courses/ individual teachers
 - On the ground grass-roots initiatives instigated by students
 - Other (please state what kind of action)

Please outline any specific actions/processes/initiatives which you think have had/might have a great impact on fostering a quality culture at your institution.