

EADTU-ENQA Peer Learning Activity

Quality Assurance of blended and online programmes

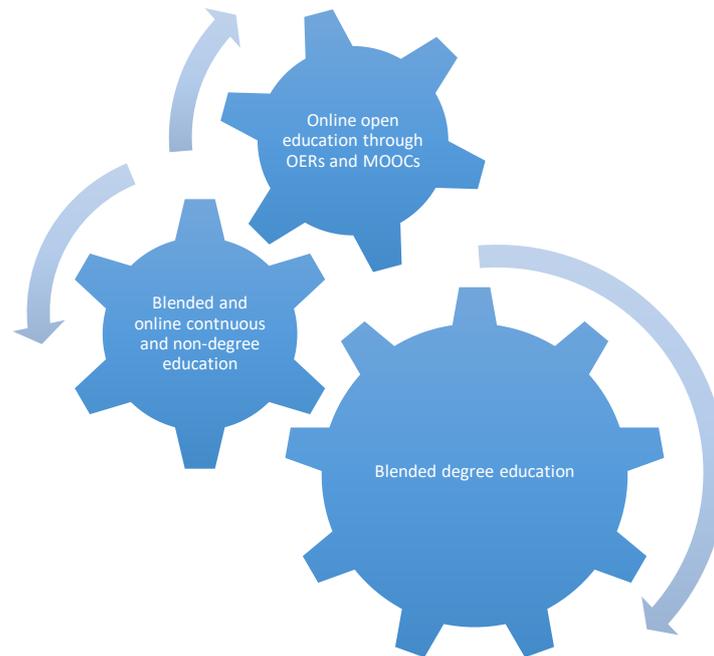
1. INTRODUCTION

In European and Western universities, three areas of provision emerge consistently: degree education, continuing education (incl. post-graduate continuous professional development or CPD) and open education (MOOCs, OERs) (see CPL study, 2015). Universities should develop visions and strategies to position themselves at the national and international level in each of these areas. They should embrace a holistic educational perspective, serving students of all ages and meeting their needs as well as these of society at large. Universities need enough autonomy to determine their position and to act flexibly and rapidly according to developments in research and innovation and to respond to changes in society and in the economy.

ICT-based modes of teaching and learning can solve problems higher education is facing today and will offer new opportunities for teaching and learning in each of these areas. They will innovate and even transform higher education provisions in the course of next years.

Hybrid or blended education will raise the quality and efficiency of degree education, facing large numbers of students and lower staff/students ratios. Online education will upscale the area of continuing education and continuous professional development (CPD) by offering flexible courses with a larger outreach responding to the needs of learners at work, who face longer careers and career shifts. MOOCs are offered online only, providing massive and open learning opportunities for all, promoting engagement in the knowledge society.

Innovation in education towards more blended and online systems is important to solve these problems and to keep pace with the needs of learners of all ages and of society.



There are 5 main stakeholders to pave the way for further innovation in education:

- Learners
- Universities
- Quality assurance agencies
- Regions, governments,
- European Commission

In this Peer Learning Activity focusing on Quality Assurance of blended and online programmes, we bring stakeholders together in a constructive dialogue towards awareness and new steps in the uptake of new modes of teaching.

2. ON CAMPUS BLENDED EDUCATION

In on campus bachelor and master degree education, blended or hybrid teaching and learning will enhance the quality of higher education, facing large student numbers and lower staff/student ratios. This movement has started in most European universities.

On campus universities always will keep an important face-to-face component in the blend, valuing traditional teaching and learning formats combined with online formats. This blend can be very different for bachelor and master programmes.

In some European countries, an increasing number of degree students is studying part-time, which additionally will push universities to adapt new pedagogies with a larger online component in the blend to make courses more flexible and accessible for students.

Blended learning

The concept of blended learning itself is far from clear-cut. The literature spans various definitions and meanings, e.g. "the thoughtful integration of conventional and digital methods of teaching and learning" (Graham, et al., 2013). It is agreed that the digital is not a supplement and does not simply replicate aspects of the conventional – each should enhance the other. Blended learning combines conventional and digital methods to achieve an "optimal exploitation of ICT and internet" integrated with the conventional technologies of physical material, and co-presence in space and time. The value of blending the two is that digital methods offer much greater personalization, flexibility, inclusiveness and efficiency than conventional methods can, but they have to be used appropriately (Laurillard, 2015).

Too slow and not enough

Blended teaching and learning practice is increasing, primarily because of the ubiquitous presence of digital technology and the increase in the digital skills of both students and teachers. EUA studies revealed that a majority of HEIs have established blended learning courses and programs. But, more than half of the institutions applied blended teaching and learning in 'some' faculties or by 'individual teachers' (Gaebel, Kupriyano and Morais; Surssock (2015). The Changing Pedagogical Landscape study made clear that even within frontrunner institutions only 20% or less of the courses are blended. Moreover, many course models used just replicate face to face courses or don't meet the requirements of high quality course design.

Force field analysis

A force field analysis was done within EADTU with regard to innovation by implementing blended teaching and learning.

Positive factors for succeeding blended teaching and learning implementation were: the strong presence of digital technology at universities and digital skills of students and teachers; the availability of strong learning environments; good practices in blended teaching and learning, although incrementally dispersed; the experience with MOOCs; the need for enhancing quality for large student numbers of students; the need for covering all types of learning; where applicable a strong institutional leadership. These positive factors are important for anchoring change processes.

Negative factors were: academic culture not in favor of innovation; attitudes of students and staff towards online learning; leadership not engaged for innovation by blended teaching and learning; no policies, strategies, concepts, frameworks; misconceptions on blended/online teaching; low awareness of innovative pedagogies; blended teaching and learning competences of staff not enough developed; no adequate solutions for the changing workload of staff; partial innovations only, no maturity model; no incentives for career development; no substantial budget allocated for innovation; weak governmental strategies and support.

Developments in universities are going slow and efforts are dispersed and not systemic enough. A deep change in institutions is needed.

3. OFF CAMPUS ONLINE PROGRAMMES; THE NEW MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Distance teaching universities (open universities and many conventional universities) organise off campus degree programmes with an even larger online component, hence with a limited face to face interaction, due to the flexibility required for students, combining work and study. Open universities organize the face to face part in study centres, geographically in reach for students. The more students are studying at a distance, the more specific organisational models are required for giving students adequate access, guidance and tutoring. These models are reconciling larger numbers (mass) and personalisation.

EADTU members see an increasing need for shorter learning programmes, which can be taken in combination with a job at all stages of life. According to labour experts, the risk for qualifications becoming obsolete is increasing by the digitalisation wave in the economy and by longer careers. European estimations demonstrate that more than 25% of the 30- to 55-years old employees struggle with this problem. Hence, there is a need for investment in lifelong learning in societies, where continuing education was not enough a priority. In this respect, there are large differences between European member states. This social risk is worrying. Economic research shows that not following continuing education is an early good predictor for job loss. Unemployed people have less chance to find a durable job. In relation to the increasing age of retirement, the social risks will become more pronounced and in parallel, the needs for continuing education and CPD as well (Sels, 2017).

Learners at work should have the opportunity to update their knowledge during their career or to prepare themselves for a career switch. Because of time constraints, they typically look for short learning programmes (SLPs) for continuous professional development, in order to obtain an award, a certificate or a diploma at undergraduate and postgraduate qualification levels (EFQ 4 to 8: foundation, bachelor, master and doctoral level). At a later stage, they can valorise credits obtained by SLP modules and courses as building blocks in broader degree programmes. SLPs fit in the European Qualification Framework.

Fact sheets of the European Commission show that neither the EU attainment objectives for higher education nor for lifelong learning are achieved and that there are dramatic differences between member states, although progress is made. 40% of the employers face problems with recruiting workforce with the right qualifications. The EU employment rate is 53% for low-skilled young people and 80% for high-skilled. SLPs can compensate for these figures at a later stage of life, which is badly needed.

SLPs are innovative in many respects:

The role of short learning programmes

This role will increase as a new area of educational provision in universities, serving large numbers of students having a restricted study time horizon and meeting needs of the economy and society at large. Generally, European universities are not used to offer continuing education/continuous professional development at a large scale. The backbone of educational provisions is degree education. Most initiatives for continuous education are small and not scalable to face the needs of companies and of society at large. The modularisation of a degree curriculum doesn't suffice to meet the needs of these learners. SLPs, eventually composed of such modules and other components, will meet these needs, when conceived for these target groups and when embedded in a learner-oriented organization such as university extensions. These extensions are only dealing with education for adult students. Student numbers can largely exceed mainstream degree programmes in initial education as shown by some top universities.

Blended/online short learning programmes

Blended/online SLPs are in particular suitable for teaching large numbers of students, combining work and study, especially when they are conceived for flexible and independent learning. They fit with the time constraints and the time horizon of learners: learners can learn where and when they want, at home or in a company, dependent of their situation. With ICT-based modes of teaching and learning, the flexibility of SLPs will increase as face to face activities on campus are restricted.

Innovative curriculum and course design

SLPs require innovative approaches to curriculum and course design, involving new pedagogies and appropriate technologies for a distributed delivery. Guidelines for course design for SLPs are needed, as principles of online course design are not enough applied in today's higher education practice. They deal with the use of technologies, e.g. for active learning, inquiry-learning, collaborative learning, practice learning and production learning (Laurillard, 2015). A compendium with patterns of good practices on flexible and scalable SLPs (curriculum development, course design and new pedagogies for SLPs) would help as well.

Innovative contribution to the European Qualification Framework

SLPs contribute to the discussion on a renewed EQF, which is announced in the New Skills Agenda, including the integration of informal and non-formal learning (e.g. MOOCs). SLPs can link with all levels of the EQF-HE, from the foundation to the postgraduate level. SLPs will also need institutional quality assurance.

Innovative institutional policies, strategies, organisational and business models

The conceptualization and reflection on the role of SLPs will lead to change in the respective institutions: policies/strategies, staff and student support structures, business models and possible collaborations. This will promote the systemic development of SLPs and CE/CPD as a new area of provision in higher education. For this development, funding and optimized business models are important.

Force field analysis

A force field analysis on the development of SLPs was made within EADTU.

Positive factors, supporting the development of SLPs are: the need for continuing education/CPD by the digitalisation of the economy and the prolongation of careers (qualifications becoming obsolete); policies, strategies and good practice in front-runner universities; the potential of ICT-based modes of teaching and learning for large scale, flexible provisions; social partners and governments are aware of needs; the European policy agenda: the Modernisation Agenda, ET2020 and the New Skills agenda, the new Agenda for Higher Education, e.g. closing the knowledge and skills gap/mismatch, increasing attainment levels in higher education and LLL, adapting the EQF, regional development; the Bologna process, as a follow-up of the Yerevan Message.

Negative factors identified were: culture for continuing education/CPD as a large scale area of provision not developed enough at universities; university-business collaboration has started a strong development in the area of knowledge transfer in many universities, but not with regard to continuous education and CPD (exc. the EIT KICs); many European member states, governments didn't develop policies and strategies for CE/CPD, neither for high quality online/blended education; lack of leadership, institutional policies and strategies in the area of CE/CPD; not enough expertise and even resistance to online/blended teaching and learning (although it is breaking through in mainstream degree education); staff is not trained for continuing education/CPD; universities didn't develop a coherent award system for SLPs (awards, certificates, diploma's, etc. next to bachelor and master degrees); universities didn't develop adequate business models for CE/CPD (they do now for knowledge transfer/valorization, resulting in models which can be at least partially applied to SLPs and CE/CPD).

4. THE ADDED VALUE OF BLENDED AND ONLINE EDUCATION

Using new modes of teaching and learning, teaching staff is *extending the environment* of face to face education in a classroom to a virtual learning environment, giving access to e-learning activities belonging to a course, and to knowledge resources worldwide. This enables staff to design *personalized teaching and learning* with the students and their talents and ambitions at the center. Rich learning environments bring students closer to research, innovation and professional developments. By this extension, education can become more *intensive*.

New modes and teaching and learning can contribute to different types of learning: acquisition, inquiry, discussion, practice, collaboration, production learning (Laurillard, 2015) and hence can contribute to deep level learning.

Within these extended learning environments, students can learn through *group interactions*: groups discussions and group tasks. They revitalize peer learning.

New modes of teaching and learning create also *flexibility*. They take higher education to students when and where they need it by adopting asynchronous course components. It can bring education to the working floor as well as to the student's home.

New modes of teaching and learning enable institutions to *upscale their outreach to large numbers of students* in all environments.

Online/blended education brings a new dimension to *internationalization*, involving partners abroad or not. Blended and online courses and curricula and mobility can be organized, involving two or more campuses, even respecting time zones. This goes as well for doctoral programs.

Online and blended mobility is more inclusive than physical mobility only, as in principle transnational classrooms can involve *all* students of a class/ seminar/project. Both should be possible in any learning track in higher education, each with its own functions.

Finally, new modes of teaching and learning are *cost-effective* if it works with large numbers, because of a lower variable cost, especially when teachers collaborate or can build on each other's designs.

Universities should be empowered for organizing blended and online programmes and for collaborating with other institutions and with companies.

5. Quality Assurance

Consistent quality assurance processes are essential for well-performing higher education institutions. Quality assurance must cover all provisions of education during all stages of life; initial degree education and continuing education continuous professional development incl. SLPs.

Quality assurance must cover processes of teaching and learning face-2-face as well as blended and online education. A dialogue is needed between universities, QA agencies and governmental bodies leading to aligned strategies and approaches in quality assurance. This to ensure that current frameworks and regulations not impede further innovation of education and rapid and flexible responses to continuous education.

6. PLA APPROACH

EUA research, The EU2020 indicators and the CPL study revealed large differences between institutions and between member states with regard to innovation in higher education and the participation in lifelong learning. The Commission document on the renewed EU agenda for higher education aims at the innovation of higher education and at new approaches to high-level skills development.

The PLA will identify next steps in the development of blended and online degree and continuing education in a dialogue between main stakeholders: universities, governments, quality assurance agencies and students.

It will take first steps, based on the ROMA approach for policy development (Young et al., 2014):

- Achieve a common understanding and identifying the rationale of blended and online approaches in degree education and short learning programmes

- Analyse positive and negative forces on innovation in degree education and SLPs through a force field analysis
- Making a stakeholder analysis, involving main stakeholders participating in the PLA
- Define stakeholder-related progress markers for innovation in degree education and SLPs in a three stages perspective (short term or what we expect to see; medium-term or what we like to see in next (eventually incremental) developments; and long-term or what we love to see in 10 years' time)

From there, a *strategy for change and innovation* can be developed by these stakeholders.

For each step, introductions and provisional tables will be prepared and presented by.

7. TARGET GROUPS:

- a. Public authorities responsible for tertiary and higher education
- b. Higher education institutions: senior academic management
- c. Higher education institutions: programme directors
- d. Quality assurance agencies
- e. Students

8. DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THE PLA:

- a. An enhanced common understanding of QA in blended and online on campus and off campus education;
- b. To have identified key elements that should be moved forward in order to strengthen the dialogue between governments, QA-agencies and universities in this field;
- c. To identify the expertise needed and ways of sharing at European level;
- d. To identify ways forward and lower thresholds in innovating education;
- e. To identify ways forward by stimulating innovation in education;
- f. To have identified the different approaches;
- g. To have identified future innovative projects related to the topic of the PLA.

9. TIMING:

September 2017

10. Venue: Dutch House of Provinces