Minutes 6th March 2009

Local seminar E-xcellence+
Rome

The International Telematic University UNINETTUNO (UTIU) organised a Seminar, in which it illustrated its path towards quality assurance, the activities related to the evaluation of the didactics and presented a self-evaluation tool, the QuickScan, that the E-xcellence project, coordinated by EADTU, has being designing, and that is useful to facilitate the self-evaluation procedures by the individuals working in the University, focusing attention on educational design and planning, by computer-based support, on the university management and on the sharing of strategies for quality assurance aimed at enhancing the proposed tool. The seminar also represented a first meeting among the active protagonists of the UTIU training process that will be followed by a further meeting in September 2009 that will be more structured during which the results of the QuickScan application to the delivered course will be illustrated.

During the seminar initial phase, Prof. Lowyck illustrates some of the documents related to the E-xcellence+ Project, which presents its objectives. The QuickScan tool was designed in the project framework; it is the self-evaluation tool that should be implemented in the UTIU quality assurance system. It is important that all the actors involved in the training activities (university professors, tutors, students, staff) give their feedback in using the questionnaire. Actually, the EADTU is collecting all the project partners' experience in order to highlight any critical aspects, draw common action guidelines and enhance this tool. The seminar that will have to take place in September will be the occasion to share these results.

In addition, Prof. Lowyck hopes that the questionnaire on the students' opinions used by the UTIU in its quality assurance system be reorganised in order to match QuickScan parameters.

In the second part of the meeting the President of the Board of Evaluation illustrates UTIU's quality assurance strategies. It is reminded that at the basis of the organisation of the University there always been the tendency towards possible highest quality for distance education, the strong commitment towards the internationalisation (an example of this is the involvement in this project) and the significant investments in technological infrastructures. It is necessary to spread the quality assessment strategies among the stakeholders of the educational system in order to check their good working. Actually the whole University, at all levels, has to undertake to assure quality: from the managing boards to the single students.

UTIU's decision to join the first E-xcellence project, promoted by the EADTU, came exactly from the intention to assure the high quality level of its own distance teaching pathways. UTIU participated in the first pilot project, which led to the identification of a handbook on quality (that is available on the project website http://www.eadtu.nl/e-xcellenceqs/default.asp?page=manual) and to QuickScan. The QuickScan may benefit the institution in order to check, at different levels, whether its activities are performing well: the various sets of questions proposed by QuickScan (benchmarks) actually survey all the aspects linked to delivery and planning of e-learning teaching, from the "management" level to the "student" level.

In Italy, quality assessment of Universities' teaching quality is mostly carried out on the basis of the students' opinions. A present there is a drive to get to a more comprehensive assessment and, therefore not only on students' part, through many agencies specialised in quality assurance. In this setting, all that UTIU does in the field of quality assurance is surely a useful contribution for the identification of quality assessment strategies of e-learning universities for which at present definite guidelines are still lacking.

QuickScan is submitted to the participants by accessing EADTU website. The questionnaire is divided into 6 sections and in each of them it is asked to express the level corresponding to the specified parameters and the different aspects of the structure being assessed according to a four-

level range going from "not adequate" to "fully adequate". The QuickScan is aimed at getting a first simple auto-evaluation of the institution made by the University's "active" players.

The sections of this questionnaire deal with strategic management, curriculum design, course design, course delivery, staff support and student support.

The evaluations assigned to each parameter allow to automatically generate a feedback including a general score summing up how close the institution is to the situation of highest quality assurance according to E-xcellence and remarks as it regards each parameter, suggesting also what the institution should do in order to get closer to the optimal quality level.

In the third part of the meeting, Lawyer Salmini illustrates the results of the survey of the opinions of the students attending the courses for academic year 2006/2007. Even if is a telematic university, UTIU students cannot be considered actually "attending" students, since their training activities are traced by the University computer-based system, as required by the telematic university institutive decree.

The results of the survey show that UTIU students are mainly middle-aged workers. Opinions were generally favourable, above all as it regards the overall study workload, the flexibility of the training path, the effectiveness of the online tutoring, the tutors' availability, online training materials of which videolessons and exercises were greatly appreciated.

It is important to note that the tutor's profile, as well as chats and virtual classrooms are completely new and unknown tools in traditional universities. It is essential to understand how the students evaluate these tools in order to establish the distance learning quality.

The fourth part of the meeting is focused on debate. Among the participants in the debate there is a student of the Engineering Faculty who wishes that the date collected by the Board of Evaluation are not only disseminated and also actually used to solve any problems and Dr. Paganelli, member of the Board of Evaluation, points out the lack in QuickScan of the "review" feature (available only in the curriculum design section) and which, on the contrary, should be extended to all the sections, as it is required by several quality assurance models of the didactics of traditional universities. In addition, they stress the need that, considered how QuickScan is structured, all levels of an institution, such as students, teachers, tutors, university boards, each one for what it is competent for. In addition, it is essential that the answers given for each section be shared with everybody.

The seminar fifth phase is focused on the grouping of the participants in three working teams (Students, Tutors and Teachers), each of which has to answer to two questions: the first one about the identification of the most relevant indicators as far as UTIU Quality Assurance is concerned and the second regarding the contribution that QuickScan can bring to UTIU Quality Assurance system.[1]

The **Students' team** highlights three main points concerning the first question:
1. We have to constantly check the satisfaction degree of the activities implemented, since it is important to take into account the students' opinions;

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[1] **QUESTION 1**
What are the most important indicators of Quality Assurance at the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO?

QUESTION 2
Could the Excellence Quick Scan help to improve the Quality Assurance of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO?

2. Make an evaluation of the abilities actually acquired by the students by means of tests administered after they passed their exam;
3. Monitor the interest aroused among students, counting, for instance the number of messages sent to the tutor.

With reference to this second question, QuickScan is considered useful if it succeeds in detecting the system's focal points and if it collects suggestion for improvements made by the subjects approached at the different levels.

Among the main indicators, the **Tutors' team** points out the overall organisation of the course and the graphical interface, the tutors' training support to the students (that yet has to be enhanced by continuing training of tutors), the creation of communities, the flexibility of the educational offer, considered that those who chose e-learning university has a lot of (work and family) engagements.

The tutors think that QuickScan is useful if more work is done as it regards feedback structuring. The more structured they are, the more useful; in addition, they wish that QuickScan results are spread among teachers and tutors.

The **Teachers' team** gives their opinion on the first question highlighting that all questions included into QuickScan questionnaire are important, but it will be essential that different people (teachers, tutors, students, members of the Academic Senate and of the Board of Directors) match different sub-sets of questions. For instance, the group of benchmarks related to "Strategic Management" should get an answer by the members of the Academic Senate and of the Board of Directors.

As it regards the "Curriculum Design" section it would be important to get a feedback by the individual teachers, even if the Italian system presents some institutional rigidities, with ad different degree of flexibility according to Faculty. Benchmark 2 could get an answer also by the students.

As it regards the second question, E-xcellence QuickScan can contribute to supplying indicators on the quality of the service offered by UNINETTUNO. It could be used jointly with the "survey on the students' opinions" that gives already many suggestions. Naturally, we shall have to make an effort aimed at implementing any corrective actions that may be required in the light of the suggestions resulting from the questionnaires.

The meeting end with the sharing of the results obtained by working groups.

The Seminar video streaming is available:
mms://streaming.uninettuno.it/streaming/mediagallery/eventi/seminario-exellence.wmv