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Enhancing Quality of Technology-Enhanced Learning at Jordanian Universities

eQTeL

European State-of-the-Art in TEL QA

ENQA Report

Introduction

This report provides a very general overview of the state of the art of quality assurance (QA) of technology-enhanced learning (TeL) in Europe as input and inspiration for the establishment of a TeL QA framework in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This report is based on publications drafted during the last few years by ENQA and other organisations active in the field of QA of European higher education, such as the European University Association (EUA), the European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning (EFQUEL), the European Association for Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), and the European Commission's policy papers.

The report will give an overview of the current status of QA of TeL in Europe by considering the European quality approaches towards e-learning; quality of e-learning through some examples of European e-learning labels, degree of openness, and current instruments to measure the outcomes of e-learning; reflections on e-learning in the light of the basic principles of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG); and some future prospects for e-learning in Europe.

E-learning in European QA Approaches

It is clear that e-learning programmes and initiatives must undergo QA assessment, and there is currently an ongoing debate in Europe whether the existing internal and external QA procedures are appropriate. A study conducted by EUA between October and December 2013, which included 249 higher education institutions from 38 European systems, suggests that for a long time, e-learning was merely a peripheral consideration for QA bodies [1]. Apart from a few initiatives and labels developed by e-learning networks, QA of e-learning was not given the attention it deserved. But with the usage and impact of e-learning growing among higher education institutions, e-learning has become increasingly relevant to higher education institutions in their QA approaches (according to one-third of the respondent institutions) as well as by their respective QA agencies (according to one-fourth of the respondents). In addition, one-third of the respondents mentioned that QA in e-learning is currently a topic of discussion within their institutions and among the QA agencies.

E-learning was not under the QA spotlight until recently, but the European e-learning community did develop its own entities and guidelines such as the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning (EFQUEL) and the European Association for Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU).

The boundaries between traditional modes of learning and e-learning is becoming increasingly confusing as the use of technology is becoming more frequent within higher education institutions, and the connection between face-to-face and virtual learning environments is becoming complicated due to the dissolution of these barriers. From this perspective, it seems that it is high time for institutions and QA agencies in Europe to contemplate and consider how the existing (internal and external) QA procedures could be further improved and adapted to the changes in the learning provisions.

On the European policy level, the European Commission (EC) fully supports flexible learning to improve education and training systems. The EC underlines the strong need for flexible, innovative learning approaches and delivery methods to improve quality and relevance while expanding student numbers. In its 2014 Report on progress in quality assurance in higher education, the EC underlines that the QA frameworks and institutions need flexibility to support institutions in adopting different modes of innovative course delivery, adapting their concepts of quality and developing new indicators to enable these changes [2].



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In addition, in the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education's report to the European Commission on New modes of learning and teaching in higher education³, the group encourages the public authorities to develop guidelines for ensuring quality in open and online learning, and to promote excellence in the use of ICT in higher education provision. Furthermore, the European Commission is invited to support cross-border initiatives to develop quality standards for open and online learning under the Erasmus+ programme.

Quality of eLearning

With the increasing use of technology in the delivery methods of higher education institutions over the past few years, there is now a clear need to address the quality of e-learning. On the European level, this need led to the establishment of bodies such as the European Foundation for Quality in e-Learning (EFQUEL) and the European Association for Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), who deliver certifications and marks to ensure quality on the course level. The ECBCheck certification provided by EFQUEL and the Excellence Associates label provided by EADTU are two labels specifically targeted at measuring e-learning course quality.

ECBCheck Certification (EADTU) and the E-xcellence Associates Label (EFQUEL)

ECBCHECK Certification

The ECBCheck Quality label for courses and short programmes certifies excellence in the use of ICT in training courses, short courses, and professional programmes within the field of vocational education and training, post graduate offers and lifelong learning. The certification process consists of a self-assessment and a virtual course review. It supports organisations to measure how successful their e-learning programmes are and allows for continuous improvement through peer collaboration and benchmarking. ECBCheck forms a participative quality environment which allows its members to benefit in a variety of ways by granting access to tools and guidelines for their own practice on the one hand, and being able to obtain a community-based label on the other hand [4].

E-xcellence Associates Label

The E-xcellence Associates label measures strategic management, curriculum design, course design, course delivery, staff support, and student support. It focuses on the improvement of four priority elements of progressive higher education: accessibility, flexibility, inter-activeness and personalization. The label supports universities to improve their e-learning performance by a guided self-assessment. This assessment can be a stand-alone exercise for the higher education institution, leading to a first insight in fields of improvement. The approach can be extended with a review at a distance or on-site from e-learning experts. This extension is formalized with an E-xcellence Associates label.

The E-xcellence assessment can be performed on different levels depending on how comprehensive the higher education institution wishes its evaluation to be. The assessment tools include the following [5]:

- “Quick scan” option which gives a first orientation on the strengths of the institution's eLearning performance and fields for improvement;
- “Quick scan with a review at a distance” option which enables institutions to determine the performance of their e-learning programmes and to pinpoint the requirements for further enhancement. With this assessment tool, the institution can map the e-learning efforts of different sections. The institution is authorised to use the E-xcellence label once it fulfils the condition of integrating the benchmarks in their internal QA system;
- “Quick scan with an on-site assessment” option which also enables institutions to determine the performance of their e-learning programmes and to pinpoint the requirements for further enhancement through a peer review on site.

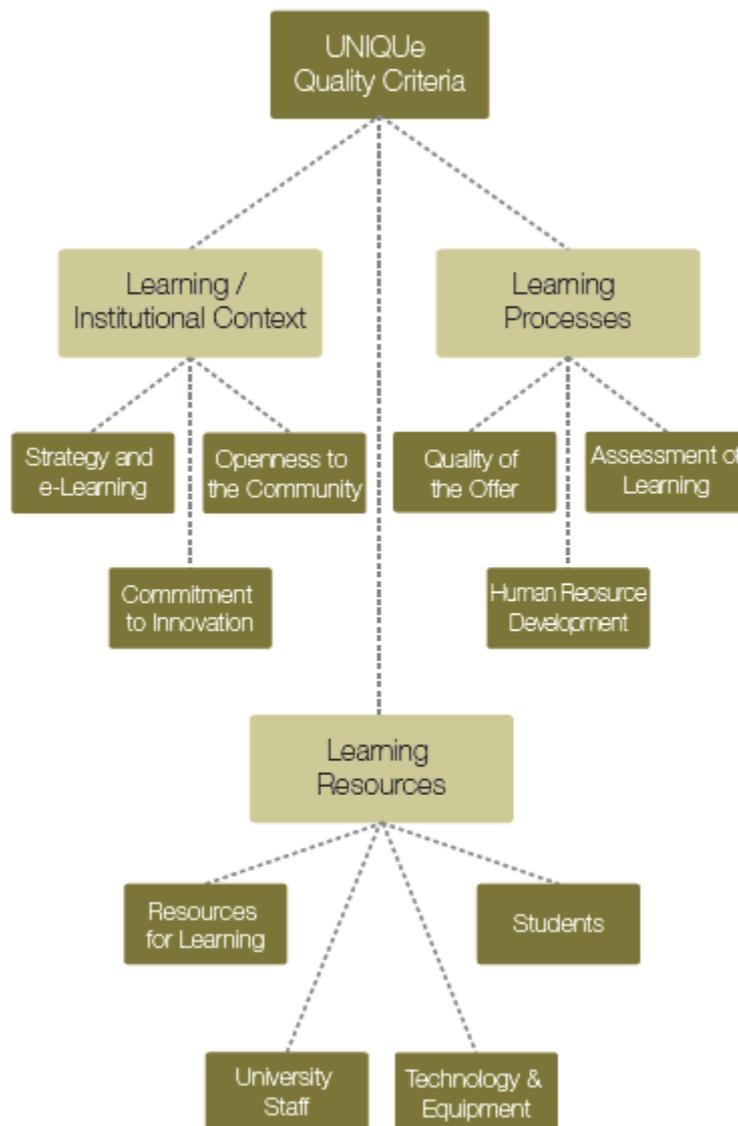
In addition to the assessment tools, EADTU published a manual entitled Quality Assessment for E-learning: a Benchmarking Approach which contains benchmarks, criteria, and indicators for QA of e-learning.



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UNIQUE Scheme for eLearning (EFQUEL)

UNIQUE is a high quality institutional certification for outstanding use of ICT in learning and teaching. It is awarded to universities or institutes after a process of self-assessment and external peer review, for renewable periods of three years. Unique identifies the institutional-level criteria for mainstreaming e-learning strategy and practice across higher education institutions. By demanding proof of continuous innovation in all aspects of institutional management, pedagogical design of the curricula, and the course delivery, it ensures a holistic review of the design, supply, and evaluation of e-learning within institutions [6].



Overview of UNIQUE quality criteria

Basic Principles of the ESG and eLearning

The *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should not be seen as contradictory or as an obstacle for innovation and enhancement of the QA processes in higher education. On the contrary, if considered as a frame for QA, the ESG could even be considered as a catalyst for the elaboration and definition of new concepts of quality. Within



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this perspective, analysing the basic principles of the ESG could support understanding of how the ESG can be consistent with e-learning and raise further questions for the future. This is even more relevant considering the student-centred learning and teaching approach adopted by the revised ESG proposal [7] which is subject to approval by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015, in Yerevan, Armenia.

Below are some reflections and questions concerning the basic principles of the ESG and e-learning based on the ENQA Workshop report on *Quality Assurance of E-learning* [8]:

- One of the basic principles of the ESG states that providers of higher education should have the primary responsibility to ensure the quality of their provision. However, e-learning programmes are increasingly crossing borders, with students enrolling from different countries and teachers being located in others. With regard to e-learning, the question here would focus on how to match this primary responsibility of institutions with the needs of their respective QA agencies and other stakeholders.
- Another basic principle of the ESG underlines that the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded. The concept of society here needs to be reflected upon carefully, as the definition gets broader when considering e-learning. This gains even more importance if one wishes to consider the “society’s” voice when looking at the quality of study programmes. This is also true when it comes to funding schemes for higher education. It is useful to think who is investing in higher education and who benefits from it.
- A third basic principle focuses on the quality of academic needs to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In this sense, e-learning could be seen as an important means to support mobility in higher education across the EHEA and provide interesting opportunities to students and other stakeholders.
- A fourth basic principle refers to the need of efficient and effective organisational structures within academic programmes. E-learning can support this principle and provide the flexibility to organise the programmes in different ways with the help of the new technologies. E-learning can offer the opportunity to improve the way in which departments and institutions are organised. However, it is important to underline that the current QA procedures/strategies need to adapt to the rapid changes in the technologies used for e-learning.
- A fifth basic principle of the ESG points out transparency and the use of external expertise in QA processes. These are crucial to increase confidence in the quality of all kinds of programmes but especially those of e-learning. The external QA of e-learning is still a vague issue, and QA agencies have much to explore in this field.
- A sixth basic principle states that accountability processes should be developed, so higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including for public and private money. Considering that e-learning enables the easy delivery of academic programmes at the European level, accountability for public and private investors would be an issue to be handled with care, and the expectations of various stakeholders on the national and international level should be met. This is another topic that needs to be considered by QA agencies.

In addition, one of the main outcomes of the revised version of the ESG is the emphasis it places on student-centred learning and teaching, which is translated by an additional standard on “Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment” under Part 1. This standard states that institutions should ensure the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process. The guidelines provided for the implementation of this standard encourage flexible learning paths, the use of different modes of delivery, a variety of pedagogical methods, and a sense of autonomy in the learner - all of which support and are compatible with TeL.

5. Future Prospects for eLearning within Institutions in Europe

The EUA study on e-learning researched some possible future prospects for higher education institutions in the European context and considered the future plans of the surveyed institutions for e-learning. The study looked into the strategic objectives of the institutions in terms of **flexibility of provision and effectiveness** and **prospects for collaboration**.



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According to the study, flexibility of learning provision, enhanced effectiveness of classroom time, and more and better learning opportunities for distance learning and resident students are the main motives for institutions to develop e-learning further.

When asked about the most important objective concerning the development of e-learning in the future within their institutions, over a quarter of the respondents stated that e-learning provides for more flexible learning. This is in line with the spirit of the revised ESG, which supports the implementation of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment through enabling flexible learning paths, consideration and use of different modes of delivery, flexible use of a variety of pedagogical methods, etc. Increasing the effectiveness of classroom time and providing more learning opportunities for off-campus students constitute the second objective for the development of e-learning for the institutions. The results show that the need and trend towards flexible learning provision is present.

Interestingly, e-learning is seen as a way of enhancing internationalisation by only 8 percent of the respondents. It seems that the benefits of e-learning for internationalisation have not been fully identified by the institutions and would require some more time.

The study also concentrated on how the surveyed institutions perceive the impact of e-learning on collaboration, which constitutes an important factor for the future of European higher education. The results underlined that the majority (70%) of the respondent institutions perceive e-learning as a means of enhancing collaboration within their own institutions and with other higher education institutions abroad despite the fact that internationalisation is not perceived as one of the main objectives of e-learning. The results also suggest that less importance is given to collaboration with higher education institutions within the same country, employers, and private education providers.

Another potential benefit of e-learning, as underlined by the results of the survey, concerns the future plans of respondent institutions regarding online degrees offered jointly with other higher education institutions. Currently, 60 percent of respondent institutions (82 out of 137) who consider collaboration via e-learning with other institutions important are already offering joint online degrees or plan to do so in the future.

The results of the survey underline that institutions clearly perceive e-learning as a means to collaborate within their institutions and/or with other institutions abroad. These potential collaborative e-learning initiatives would need to be further explored within the framework of institutional approaches along with their potential legal and financial implications.

6. Conclusion

QA of TeL was not among the top priorities of higher education institutions and QA agencies in Europe for quite a while. In addition, the e-learning community established its own bodies and guidelines for e-learning, such as EFQUEL (ECBCheck Certification) and EADTU (E-xcellence Associates Label). But with the changing scene and the increase in the use of technologies in the delivery methods of institutions, QA of TeL has now emerged as a hot topic that deserved special attention among institutions and QA agencies. In fact, a growing number of institutions and QA agencies are now considering TeL methods when developing or elaborating internal or external QA procedures. There is still a lot of work to be done and areas to be explored (such as the assessment of the learning outcomes or the legal and financial implications) with regard to QA of TeL, but the future looks promising, as the institutions and QA agencies are well aware that adapting their procedures to the rapidly changing environment is the only way to stay ahead of the game.

Quality Assurance of TEL Programs in Catalonia

The vision of QA Agency

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (hereinafter AQU Catalunya or AQU) is a public entity with an internationally recognised status. Its mission is to assure the quality of higher education through compliance with international standards of quality and to safeguard the interests of society in the quality of higher education.



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Evaluation of Pre-European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Degrees

The Agency activities started in 1996, with the development of QA methodologies that permitted to conduct evaluations of 1st. and 2nd. Cycle programmes, but also Institutions and Services (such as Library services) by 1998. During a long period of more than 10 years, the main activity was focused on evaluate almost all programmes in Catalonia, with a continuous improvement oriented methodology called PROQ.

The PROQ methodology put emphasis on some elements that permitted to measure the capacity of the Institutions and Programmes to sustain an improvement based on the analysis of key elements and quality indicators, and the establishment of criteria and reference values for each standard.

Virtual Program

By 2007 a new methodology based on the PROQ experience was designed to evaluate Institutions that delivers online Programmes. It was called 'Virtual Program', and was tested in 2008 in collaboration with Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC).

The adaptation of the assessment system to the specific nature of online distance learning suggested that we should divide the methodology in two units of analysis:

- Institutions
- Degrees

One specific methodology to assess the institution (in that case, the UOC, and other specific methodology to assess 'n' number of Programmes or Degrees. The 'Institutional' methodology established the following standards:

1. Institutional mission and vision
2. System capacity
 - Students
 - Teaching
 - Staff
 - Infrastructure
 - External Relations
3. Internal QA System
 - Study
 - Programme
 - Learning assessment
 - Outcomes

The 'Programme' methodology established the following standards:

1. Strategic position
2. Study program
3. Instruction design
 - Methodology
 - Organisation
 - Student
 - orientation
 - Technical
 - Setup
 - Communication system
4. Learning assessment
5. Outcomes
 - Academic
 - Professional
 - Personal



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Each Programme to be evaluated took into consideration the results of the ‘Institutional’ evaluation. All the information about Virtual Program can be consulted in the AQU Catalunya website: http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/abansees/virtual_en.html .

Evaluation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Degrees

Nowadays, the main activity of AQU Catalunya in the field of programmes evaluation is the evaluation of Bologna adapted Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate programmes. It is established by law, and it has consequences on the recognition of degrees.

It consist on a set of QA procedures: ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation that conform the current Framework for QA of recognized degrees.

Besides the increasing diversity of modes (online degrees, blended learning, traditional degrees enhanced by technologies,) all of them must be evaluated by the same framework.

Conclusion

A QA Framework for TEL programs should be aligned to the national (and international) QA Standards. In our case in Catalunya our QA methodologies must follow the ESG European Standards and Guidelines).

Taking into consideration our experience with the Virtual Program, a QA Framework should not forget the relevance of internal QA procedures, and assessment at institutional level

Finally, in order to complete the Framework, more benchmarks are needed in order to:

1. Define useful indicators for TEL
2. Set reference values
3. Identify good practices

USGM Experience

The shift from a traditional teaching model to an innovative way of providing education implies the modernization of the organizational structures within institutions and the development of ICT-mediated training processes able to efficiently merge pedagogy, technology and research.

In this perspective, it becomes necessary to build up effective and updated competences in providing ICT-based teaching and learning courses and strengthening the organizational-managerial know-how of those who are engaged in planning and developing online training paths. In this framework quality represents an essential factor of a high level educational offer which is provoking a real revolution in the processes of valorization of the common heritage of competences constantly producing new knowledge.

Quality often identifies a tension between two roles of quality assurance: as a means of accountability and as a route to quality improvement. There is another key debate about the role of the student in defining quality. Some argue that defining quality in higher education should begin with the assumption that online learning is a process of co-production between the online learning environment and the student, with the student perspective taken as the starting point of quality development across the various areas of online learning provision. These tensions become more demanding as new modes of provision increasingly become part of traditional campus-based higher education provision and as institutions try to use the *same mechanisms* to deal with these completely new forms of courses. There is therefore a need to define objective standards for the delivery of efficient quality learning paths applicable at international level.

A training process in distance modality is not simply marked by the opportunity to access online contents but also and primarily by the services supporting learning and students. In this perspective *FADRIVE Certification*® has been developed to meet the international demand for objective standards ensuring the delivery of high quality e-learning programs. The model was born from collaboration between USGM and some experts committed to the development of quality assurance in distance education. *FADRIVE Certification*® has originated from a vision emphasizing the importance of the role that ICT-mediated distance learning covers in terms of effectiveness of services supporting training.



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In order for organizations to work effectively, it is necessary to set and manage several interconnected activities by means of a process-driven approach. This approach envisages the identification, interaction and management of processes in order to achieve the expected results.

The resulting advantage resides in the possibility of regularly checking the connection and combination of such processes.

The application of the process-driven approach to a distance education system entails to draw particular attention to the:

- input requirements fulfillment
- process assessment in terms of added value
- results achievement in terms of performance and process effectiveness
- continuing processes improvement based on objective measurements

Compared to already experience standard models such process is not easy to develop since it is necessary to organize and monitor all services in a structured way paying attention to an accurate cost-effective planning and a strong investment in human resources. The core element of this process is indeed the valorization of human capital. The *learning process* is perceived like a path in which the pupil has a central role in an interactive dynamic process between different actors.

However, the centrality of human capital in the process of distance learning focuses not only on the final user but also on the team contributing to the success of the various procedural steps. In this concern the organization must:

- Determine the necessary competence of the staff carrying out the activities affecting compliance with the requirements of the product
- Where applicable, provide training or take other action to acquire the necessary expertise
- Evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken
- Ensure that its staff are aware of the importance of its activities and of how they contribute to achieving the objectives for quality
- Maintain appropriate records of instruction, training, skills and experience
- The organization must also determine, provide and maintain the infrastructure needed to achieve conformity to product requirements. The infrastructure shall include, as applicable:
 - Buildings, workspaces, and related services;
 - Process equipment (both hardware and software).

FADRIVE Certification® model is based on the methodology known as "Plan-Do-Check-Act". The PDCA methodology is an iterative four-step management method used in business for the control and continuous improvement of processes and products that can be briefly described as follows:

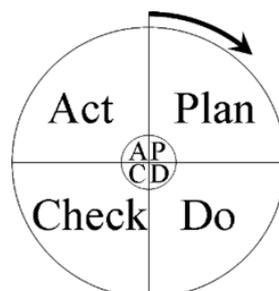
P - *Plan*. Planning, i.e. establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with the expected output (the target or goals)

D - *Do*. Implementation of the program, firstly realized in limited contexts

C - *Check*. Test and check the actual results (measured and collected in *Do* above) and compare against the expected results (targets or goals from the *Plan*) to determine any differences

A - *Act*. Action to complete and/or improve the process

The PDCA Cycle





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Like the PDCA cycle suggests the *FADRIVE Certification® model* is process-based. The objective is to allow organizations to manage its activities in order to achieve successful outcomes. A distance education process has to be analyzed by studying its different dimensions and planned by considering the production of ad hoc materials and the creation of effective services and tools able to support a complete, collaborative and interactive development. Choices can be made on the basis of different parameters and should be driven taking into account needs and limitations of education demand.

According to *FADRIVE Certification® model*, distance education is a systemic process which provides contents and services to be planned, delivered, managed, monitored and assessed and that requires an accurate cost planning for being developed. In order to obtain the certification, the concerned institutions have to comply with a set of organizational, technological and pedagogical requirements that are clearly specified in a **Technical Specifications Manual** expressly developed. Those requirements concern four different phases of the learning path, namely:

1. Design
2. Production
3. Delivery
4. Monitoring and Evaluation

1. The planning process represents the starting point and the focal element of the training project. Indeed this phase is characterized by the processing and organization of all information shaping the whole activity structure, the establishment of a first analytical contact with the social, cultural and organizational environment in which the training action will be carried out and the definition of all the strategic guidelines to follow during the subsequent stages

2. The production phase determines the teaching materials needed to meet the training needs identified in terms of: duration, treatment content and levels of interactivity/multimedia/usability/ accessibility. The different characteristics of the materials fit the content and the educational objectives of the course.

3. The delivery phase is aimed at implementing all the strategies needed for a correct/complete fruition of the course by the final users: counseling services, tutoring and Help Desk can assist and support the learner throughout the course. These exchanges of reports, among other things, allow the unit design/production to constantly monitor the fruition of the course and have continuous feedbacks on published materials.

4. A comprehensive evaluation process is foreseen at the end of the course/ programme to evaluate its quality and overall coherence, contribute to its further improvement for subsequent deliveries and reshape the training plan on the basis of the potential criticisms detected

For each phase the Technical Specifications Manual identifies:

- ORGANISATION AND PROCESS
- ACTIVITIES
- HUMAN RESOURCES INVOLVED
- INFRASTRUCTURE & TECHNOLOGY NEEDED

The goal of the procedure is therefore to provide functional management and operational criteria to handle, monitor and complete the four phases in question in terms of effectiveness/efficiency of the entire process.

FOUC Experience



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UOC, the University of the Knowledge Society

In 1995, the Catalan government promoted the creation of an accredited and completely virtual institution in order to complement the Catalan university system to make university education available to everybody, regardless of work, residence, age or other factors, by offering highly flexible courses and study programmes through technology-based distance teaching and learning.

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya was conceived as a global university rooted in a local context. Consequently, it started its activities at the regional level, in Catalonia, which made it easier to monitor its early development. In 2000, the institution started expanding to the national context (Spain) and the international market.

Regarding the development of e-learning, it is certainly difficult to compare the UOC's case with the majority of institutions that provide e-learning offerings. Along its live-span, the focus moved gradually from a material-centred model towards a pedagogical approach that focussed on students and learning processes. The pedagogical model of the UOC is the result of a development process in e-learning competences and an important factor for success. The development of the European Higher Education Area is another factor that is having influence on the ongoing development of the institution regarding course design, definition of competences, production and distribution.

The UOC is part of the Catalan public university system and as such it conforms to the educational standards set up by the accreditation Agency for the Quality of the University System in Catalonia.

The UOC belongs to a number of international associations and participates in several international forums, where it contributes to broaden the knowledge about the management of virtual teaching and research universities.

1. Vision, Mission and Objectives

The UOC is a cross-cutting Catalan university with a worldwide presence aware of the diversity of its environment and committed to the capacity of education and culture to effect social change. The UOC fosters cooperation and exchange within the university community and with other universities, institutions, the business community and civil society, whilst at the same time forging international alliances to enable sharing and learning.

The UOC offers quality online university education and promotes the following:

- Innovative education that enables personalised learning,
- Technological leadership that facilitates interaction and collaborative work,
- Academic research on information society and e-learning,
- Dissemination of knowledge.

The mission of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) is to provide people with life-long learning and educational opportunities. Its aim is to help individuals meet their learning needs and provide them with full access to knowledge, above and beyond the usual scheduling and location constraints.

The vision of the UOC is to drive the creation of a global knowledge space and cutting-edge research in the knowledge society by being connected to other universities at the global level.

UOC's educational model focuses on students; it provides them with a top quality and personalized education that allows them to be competitive and contribute to the progress of society.

The following five values guide UOC's activities:

- commitment to students, graduates and society; quality of service, and constant innovation within the organization,
- respect for people, ideas, cultures and the world,
- transparency in information, data and processes,
- professionalism, to empower the people who form part of the organization and to recognize its successes and shortcomings,



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- Sustainability, whether economic, social or environmental, of the activities undertaken by the organization.

In order to accomplish the challenges that inspire its mission, vision and values, the UOC is committed with the society in offering quality in online Higher Education to promote:

- educational innovation to allow for learning personalization,
- technological leadership to facilitate interactivity and collaborative work,
- Quality research in information society.

The UOC is a cross-cutting university that works towards accomplishing its tasks and promoting cooperation with the rest of the Catalan system's universities and establishing international partnerships that allow them to share and learn. To achieve this goal, its activity is led by a balanced budget, and optimization and efficiency principles.

The current strategic plan comprises the following pillars and objectives:

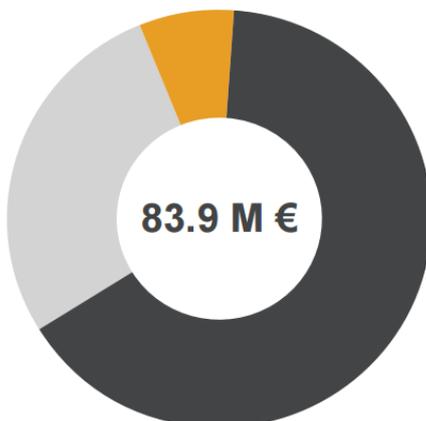
1. A multidisciplinary and flexible approach: The University pursues various strategies to address individual student requirements, based on personalized and multidisciplinary curricular pathways and permanent access to UOC services.
2. Collaborative governance with common goals: The University pursues various governance strategies to strengthen collaborative work and decision-making in achieving institutional goals.
3. Firm commitment to internationalization: The UOC implements a number of strategies to bolster its international reputation, to facilitate access to higher education around the world, and to consolidate the UOC community's international profile.
4. Increasing competitiveness and employability: The University pursues various strategies to increase its competitiveness as an institution and to create a dynamic environment in which its students can share experiences and develop entrepreneurial ideas.
5. Promoting excellence in research: The University pursues various strategies to ensure excellence in research and to strengthen the transferability of its activities.

2. Financial Resources

The UOC has both a physical and virtual advanced infrastructure to meet the requirements and to provide quality resources and services for more than 52,000 students and more than 4,000 staff.

Annual accounts of the UOC are made following the Accounting Plan for foundations and associations subject to the laws of the Catalan Government, in accordance with 259/2008 decree, of December 23rd, and the Board of Trustees have presented and approved them in the session of July 22nd of 2014. Deloitte, SL audited the annual accounts for the exercise 2013 with a positive report.

In 2013, public grants covered the expenses of the institution, which made up about 28 percent of the UOC's income, whilst student fees contributed to two thirds. The university made up the difference through revenue from several sources as consultancy services, managing other programmes, transferring its model to other universities and assessing other institutions.



Programme agreement: current grants

23.4 M € (28%)

Other income

6.0 M € (7%)

Enrolment

54.5 M € (65%)



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Figure 1: Income Distribution.

Programme agreement is a management tool that eases the relationship between the Catalan government, through the Innovation, University and Business Department, and universities to:

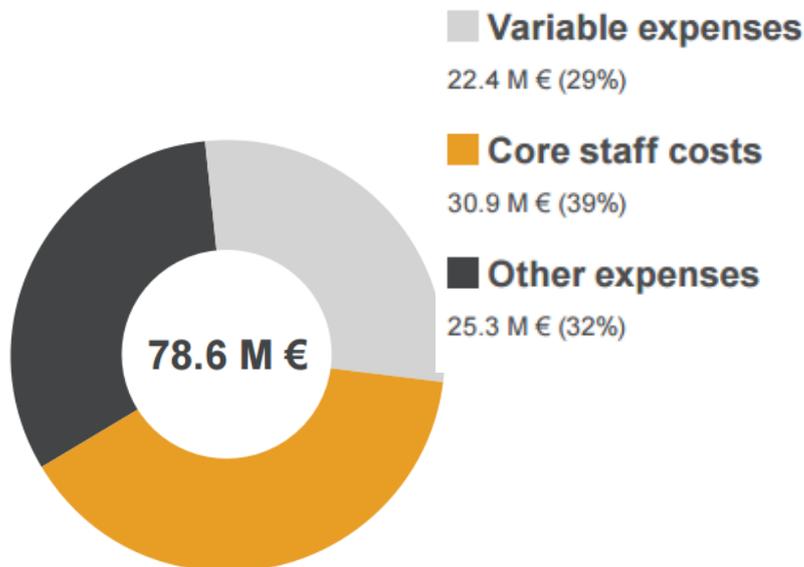
- Rate the principal activity of the university through strategic axis, actions and improvement objectives
- Establish budgetary commitments of the Administration for a specific period of time

Programme agreement is structured in three parts: an introduction to the mission and commitments of the university; strategic objectives, actions and improvement objectives, including measurement indicators; and economical commitments and coordination mechanisms.

On the expenses side, core staff cost contributed 39 percent of the total expenses and variable costs about 29 percent, mainly spent in teaching staff. The rest included, among others, outsourcing of services, publicity and renting.

Figure 2: Expenses Distribution.

UOC is committed to procure quality of both learning resources and ICT infrastructure, to its



improvement; the main investments were in teaching materials (51%) and technology (41%).



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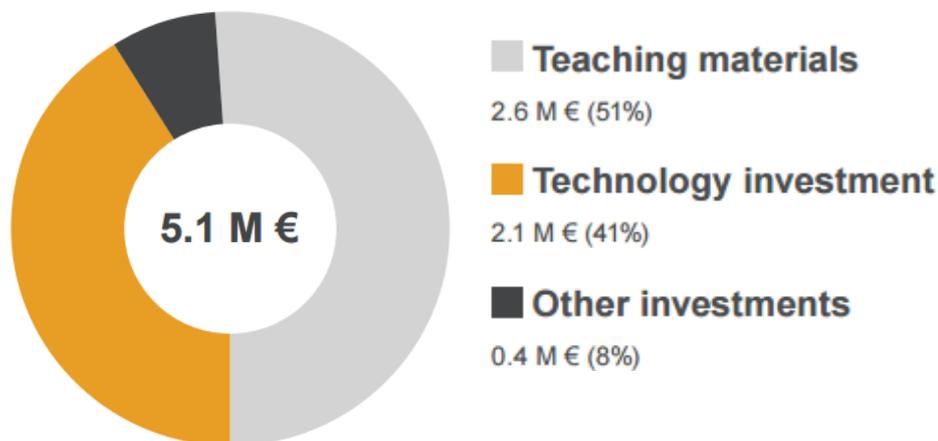


Figure 3: Investment Distribution.

3. Program Design

Official Spanish Verification Process

The Royal Decree 1393/2007 of 29th October, later amended by Royal Decree 861/2010, of July 2nd, establishes the new regulatory framework that aims to adapt and organize the design, deployment and evaluation of all future Spanish university degrees to the guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

As for the development of new programmes, the RD 1393/2007 establishes that official university degrees have to be specified in curricula to be developed by universities, according to the terms and conditions that are applicable in each case. The curricula have to be verified by the Spanish University Council (UC), through the Spanish University Quality Assurance Agency (ANECA), and its implementation authorized by the Autonomous Community, according to the provisions of Article 35.2 of Organic Law 6 / 2001, as amended by Law 4/2007 of universities. Their degrees must be entered in the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RD 1509/2008 of 12th September).

Once verified by the UC and authorized by the Autonomous Community where the university belongs, the degree can start registering students and deploying the curricula. There is a periodical external review process to renew the validity of the degree, which is called official “accreditation”. This process examines whether the development of the programme is allowing the accomplishment of the planned academic goals without significant problems or deviations.

Designing Programmes

The portfolio's implementation calendar defines the priorities for programme design; in accordance with UOC regulations, the qualifying committees are appointed by the Governing Council to carry out this calendar.

The Qualifying Committee makes use of the contributions that came out of the reflection process on the portfolio undertaken by the Advisory Council, faculty contributions, national and international models, and the identification of the needs of students and the professional sector in order to design educational programmes.

The Qualifying Committee has a specific procedure for designing proposals for educational programmes lead by the Qualifying Committee. In this educational programme design-process, a series of steps and tests are identified that ensure that the final proposal complies with legal requirements, is economically feasible and that the UOC's structure and infrastructure will be able to meet all the requirements of the proposed study programme. This process is led by the departments, which receive



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support and specific training from the management teams. The UOC makes all the documents related to this process publicly available on the Web.

The vice president is again responsible for assessing the different proposals and submitting them to the Academic Committee for final approval.

According to the protocol established in June 2009, the portfolio of UOC's degrees is approved by UOC's Governing Council. As part of the design of a degree, a feasibility study must be submitted. It must include, among other things:

- Academic, financial and management resources required.
- The internal consistency of degrees and their relationship with the rest of the training offered by the UOC.
- The alignment with the overall objectives of the university.

This feasibility study is evaluated by the Vice-chancellor for Academic Management and Faculty, by the Academic Commission, by UOC's management areas, and finally by the Governing Council. After the Governing Council approves the proposal for the new programme, it can proceed to be verified by the Spanish Ministry for Education.

Annual Monitoring of the Degrees-Monitoring Reports

The Royal Decree 1393/2007, of October 29th, states that quality agencies have to monitor the registered degrees, based on publicly available information, until the moment they have to be resubmitted to have their validity renewed, through the so-called accreditation process.

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) establishes the process for monitoring degrees. According to AQU, this is one of the main strategic instruments to continuously improve a given university: "Monitoring the official degrees allows the university to evaluate teaching development, using as evidence academic achievement and other indicators (job placement, availability of resources, satisfaction of students, lecturers and occupiers, etc.), and provides an assessment of the reality as well as proposals to improve quality. The university is the first responsible to monitor its degrees and must use the tools provided in its Internal Quality Assurance System to ensure quality."

The monitoring process involves a first phase in which the university prepares monitoring reports for each degree, and a second external analysis of these reports by AQU. The monitoring reports will be evidence for AQU's assessments for the re-accreditation of the degrees. The first annual monitoring reports were developed at UOC during the year 2009/10. They consisted of the following sections:

- Deployment; Improvement actions; Programme Information
- Enrolment indicators; Performance; Satisfaction; Practices
- Cohort follow-up; Graduates; Guidance and advice to students
- Classroom library; Services; Formalities; Public information
- Conclusions; Changes; Annexes



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4. Manageability of eLearning Programmes

The UOC has been conceived as a virtual university which involves both participating in the leadership of a virtual university and being supportive regarding e-learning.

Staff members have positive attitudes towards online teaching although some staff members still tend to follow face-to-face patterns due to their training and professional background. In order to minimize the negative effects of this phenomenon, the UOC offers special training units that help the staff members become familiarised with the institution's pedagogical model.

Flexibility

The underlying principle of offering a fully online academic and administrative service in order to gain in flexibility led to the development of the institution's online teaching and learning model that encloses a clear strategy of online education.

The UOC tries to combine the best aspects of three different learning models, the media-centred model, the teacher-centred model, and the student-centred model. It is considered that the balance can be found in a point that is closer to the student than to the teacher and closer to the latter than to media and technology which should remain a tool serving the other two elements.

It is of paramount importance to keep student's motivation high in a virtual educational environment. One important aspect in this objective is the freedom given to the students regarding the organization and planning of their own learning strategies and working pace. Students need to feel involved in every aspect of their learning process. They have to be engaged in meaningful activities communicating and collaborating with their peers. However, inductive methods used by teachers, together with learning materials, provide guidance and orientation, enabling students to follow the right path, thus facilitating the teacher's role of making things easier.

Evaluation

Quality evaluation at the UOC seeks promoting internal self-improvement within the institution. It intends to better fulfil student needs and requirements and evaluate student levels of satisfaction and their perceptions of the services received. It also aims to validate the specific pedagogical system and innovations that are introduced periodically. Student opinion plays an important role in the functioning of the university. A survey is conducted at the end of each semester in order to gather students' opinions and improve the quality of UOC degrees and services.

All teachers are subject to an evaluation process that aims to better leverage their competencies and to identify areas that would benefit from professional and personal development that are followed by suggestions on suitable training activities.

In addition, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the UOC itself are evaluated by means of surveys and open forums of debate conducted and evaluated by the UOC. The most current update of the technical infrastructure includes a full consultation on users' satisfaction, and technicians and external experts' advice that led to a new version of UOC's VLE containing new applications and functionalities.

Adaptability

The relationship between the UOC and its students with regard to administrative issues follows a model that has proven to be successful. For instance, students can consult their own academic record from home, in real time, whenever they want or need, and a back office will answer any questions they may have within 48 hours. Enrolment, delivery of teaching materials, assessment, evaluation, economical transactions, a Virtual Library etc. are some of the administrative services that take place entirely online. Their effectiveness is currently satisfactory.

There are two types of teaching staff at the UOC: full time teachers who work on a 40 hours a week contract basis and tutors, who work part time (12 to 15 hours/week) and have a flexible employment contract.

The workload of the tutors is widely predictable and manageable due to the fact that the teaching materials and the syllabus for every course are very well defined so that they can give clear indications



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about how much dedication is needed to fulfil the declared goals. The workload of this type of teaching staff also depends on the number of assigned students which also has a limit.

Cooperation

The UOC has a clear and evident commitment to cooperation in helping other universities to develop high-quality virtual learning systems which in turn it will increase its own credibility. Hence, the UOC has launched a number of initiatives to offer universities interested in collaboration the opportunity to progress together, by benefiting from UOC's good practices and expertise. The UOC further considers that it is very important to provide a framework for exchange between universities that offer virtual courses, so that they can offer more opportunities to their students.

Cooperation is also an important issue in research. The UOC research institutes – the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) and the eLearn Centre – are looking for partnerships with other similar research organizations in order to join efforts and contribute to research on the Information Society and eLearning.

Human Resources

The UOC's legal status is that of a non-profit private foundation which was established by the Catalan Government in 1995, and which has the Catalan government as its main trustee. Other important trustees are key stakeholders in Catalan society, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Savings Bank Consortium, the Catalan Broadcasting Corporation and a number of publishing companies. On the basis of proposals made by the trustees, the Catalan government appoints the university Rector.

The organizational system of the university facilitates handling large number of students. As mentioned above, there are two types of teaching staff: full-time faculty members and part-time tutors employed in a flexible way according to the number of enrolments. The former are responsible a give subject or group of subjects and author the teaching materials and the syllabi. Online teacher-tutors on the other hand have direct contact with the students and conduct or monitor the teaching and learning processes.

Towards to a Response to a Social Need

Because of the institution's commitment of covering the society's needs in higher education and the objective to offer academic programmes that are strongly relevant regarding professional needs and clearly transferable to the working context, there is a lot of pressure coming from society which constantly demand updated programmes. Furthermore, there are demands from the government that need to justify its financial support to the institution and from student body that require in high quality standards and a clear relation of the studied contents with their real needs.

UOC is organized in such a way that it allows to respond to these demands in a flexible and efficient way. The university chose new forms of management and organization based on a Process Management System, the European Foundation for Quality Management model, and structured to be able to respond directly to fulfilling student needs. The UOC combines a fixed staff sector with part time workers in order to grant this flexibility. Outsourcing is another factor that allows the institution to adapt in a more effective way to changes because it makes it less necessary to create expertise in every single aspect of the activity linked to the educational service it provides.



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5. Student Services

The Open University of Catalonia develops learning and management tasks within a framework based on a VLE (the Virtual Campus).

The main services that students can find inside the Virtual Campus are:

Planning and Communication Tools

- *My profile* is the tool that lets students present themselves and explain their interests to the rest of the UOC community.
- Students' mailbox is the main mean of communication within the Virtual Campus. Through it, students receive: Messages from their professors and mentors, important information on any procedures they have requested, alerts regarding key dates on the academic calendar.
- The academic calendar is important so that students can plan their time and make progress with their studies.

Managing Students' Academic Affairs: The Virtual Secretary's Office

The administrative relationship between the students and the university and the academic information is structured with non-traditional academic procedures. Student self-management is the base of this new focus, and the "Virtual Student Office" (SVO) exists in order to facilitate the student's access to the necessary self-management tools.

The Virtual Secretary's Office is where students will find all the academic information they need and where they can manage their academic affairs, including: enrolments; checking prices, discounts, grants and payment methods; accessing subject syllabi; checking students' transcript; and processing official requests

The Virtual Classrooms

Subjects are taught in the virtual classrooms spaces. A tutor will guide students through the subject, assign continuous assessment activities, etc. To this end, students will want to check the notice board regularly for posts and comments that will help them follow the subject. In the virtual classrooms students can find:

- Classmates with whom students can interact in the forum.
- A calendar specifying the deadlines for each activity and the start date of each new topic on the syllabus.
- The specific learning resources for the subject. Every lecturer chooses the most suitable learning resources with which to study the subject, be they UOC materials, books by publishers external to the UOC, articles, software, case studies, text or multimedia tools, direct access to UOC Library subscription content, etc.
- The teaching programme: the document explaining the assessment system, the subject's objectives, etc.
- The tools for submitting your continuous assessment activities (CAAs) and viewing the marks you have earned.

The Help-Desk Service

The Help Service will answer your queries quickly and effectively via various channels. There are three ways to submit a query to the Help Service:

- Students can tweet it to UOC at @uocestudiant (in Catalan) or @uocestudiante (in Spanish).
- Students can check UOC's FAQ and, if they do not find the answer to their question there, submit it using the specific query form. Additionally, students can check the status of their queries at any time using the "My queries" link.



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- Students can ask the UOC community to help. In the Questions and Answers forum, more than 19.000 students, alumni and staff members are able to view and answer their questions.

The Virtual Library and all its Resources

The Virtual Library offers students all the information, resources and services that they might need to help them successfully complete the continuous assessment tasks, final tests and projects.

The Virtual Library website has a powerful search engine that offers quick and easy access to the following resources:

- Databases
- Electronic journals and articles
- Books, DVDs and readers
- Recommended readings for subjects
- Teaching modules

Additionally, there are some student services outside the Virtual Campus:

The UOC Card

The card identifies you as UOC university students when required. This gives the students access to discounts and benefits that institutions and companies offer university students in general, such as admission to museums or the use of library loan services at other universities with which the UOC has an agreement.

Regional Network

The UOC has a regional network of several regional centres that offer complementary services beyond those to be found on the campus and encourage student participation at the university. The regional centres offer information and advice on the course offering, help with academic doubts and the possibility to hand in the documentation needed for the corresponding procedures.

The UOC points complete the regional network's services; they provide general information on the UOC's course offering, Library loan returns and an internet connection.

6. Instructional Design, Course Development and Evaluation

The eLearn Center (eLC) offers professors the necessary support to design courses, subjects, activities, resources and its evaluation.

The eLC has a vocation that is clearly geared towards UOC faculty, to whom it offers a range of services, including analysis and redesign of subjects or programmes, organization of themed sessions, exploration and selection of learning resources, data for improving teaching and an experimentation laboratory for pilot trials in real environments.

Subject eDesign Support (SeDA) is an advisory service aimed primarily at teaching staff and which is organized into four central elements:

- Subject/programme analysis
- (Re)design of the programme or subjects
- Sharing of experiences between teachers
- Experimentation with new activities and/or tools

The aim for this support service is to be based on evidence while also gathering it, both to provide feedback on the programmes and subjects and to improve the service itself.

With this last aim, the eLearn Center offers UOC faculty the following activities through this service:

- Organization of themed sessions be it on methodologies, learning activity types, tools or resources.
- Exploration of resources and tools.



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- Programme and subject analysis sessions and subsequent communication of proposed improvements, in both the short and the medium term.
 - X-ray of the course plan.
 - Collating students' experiences and needs on the programme to be able to update or innovate in subject design.
 - Analysis of subjects with particular characteristics, such as low performance, high dropout rate, resources that generate little satisfaction, intensive use of tools, etc.
- This service is offered in different modes: on-site or virtual, and personalized or in groups.

7. eLearning Infrastructure

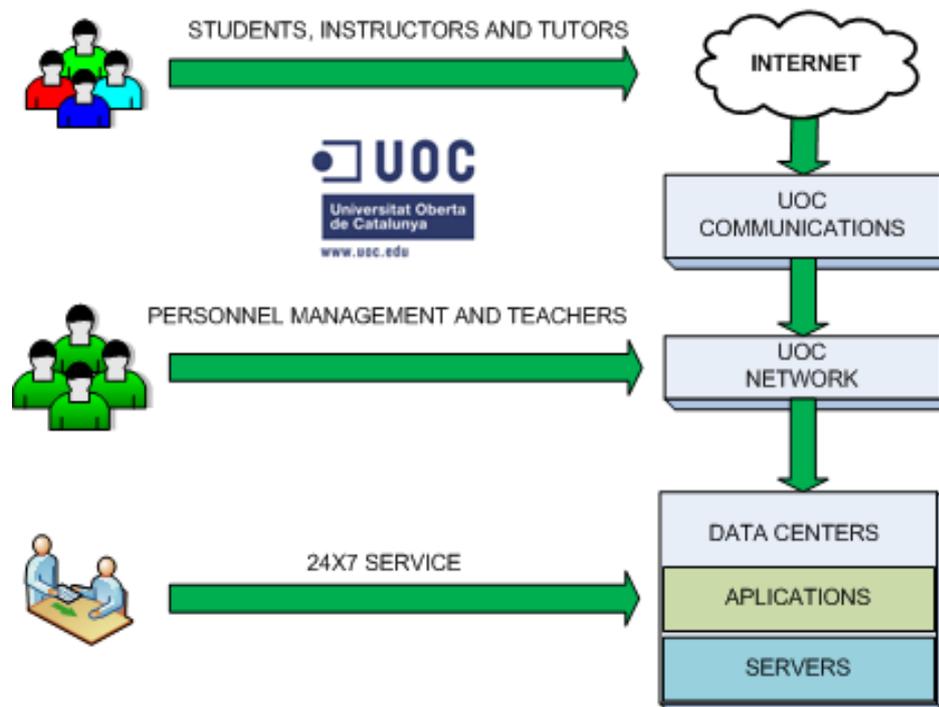
Competence in information and communication technology is very high due to the need of a competent technical team in the creation of a fully virtual university from scratch. Competence has evolved according to the changing needs regarding the maintenance of the Virtual Campus and the integration of new tools and functions.

Technological infrastructure is the set of hardware and software on which are supported the various services that the University has to put in place in order to carry out all of its teaching, research and internal administration work.

The hardware consists of such diverse elements as the air conditioning and current stabilizers in the data centres, sensors, cameras, the large-scale computers that act as applications servers, the network elements, such as routers or firewalls, personal computers, printers, telephones, etc.

The software ranges from the operating systems (a set of computer programmes designed to address a number of basic functions essential for the administration of the equipment), the systems software (general-purpose applications needed for the specific computer applications of the services to work, e.g. databases, applications and office automation tools).

A large part of the UOC's work rests on technology, so maintaining a solid and modern technological infrastructure has always been a strategic point for the university. This comprises two sturdy and secure data centres, and latest-generation computers and network elements, along with the best-positioned systems in the market, with a firm commitment to open-source software and open systems.





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Agents from any education process always interact in a specific environment. In the UOC, this environment is the Virtual Campus, which allows learning without coinciding in time or space, and it functions as the learning context. The Virtual Campus, which was developed by the Information Systems Department at UOC, is an Internet-based e-learning delivery and support system that uses a client-server web technology and common interface to integrate a wide set of services and applications. All functions of the Virtual Campus are applications that have been designed to provide an efficient environment for cooperation and e-learning.

The UOC Virtual Campus contributes to the virtual learning environment with the following features:

- It provides flexibility and interactivity through which doubts and requests are sent to the teachers and where the teacher's suggestions are received. But it is also the place from where the community can participate in university life: through forums, notice boards, activities...
- It accesses study material and resources by linking with Internet or the Virtual Library.

The Virtual Library goal is to bring to the user's computer all the contents and services of a traditional university library and at the same time improving them with the incorporation of new technology.

It will provide the community with access to the full range of information resources (e-journals, databases, newsletters, documents and resources, both created by the UOC itself and from other information centres). It moreover offers an array of customized services and can dispatch items from the UOC's physical collection. These services are:

- Virtual Desk: the primary function of this service is to provide a quick response to specific questions. As part of this service a library team responds to all request of a bibliographical nature. The user will also find a series of tools that helps to solve their information needs.
- Online Document loan.
- Document Request and Interlibrary Loan: The purpose of the Document Request and Inter-library Loan Service is to locate library resources that are not available from the Virtual Library by requesting library documents from other libraries not directly associated with the UOC, or by receiving reproductions of parts of documents that are provided to the user electronically.
- Documentation Service: This gives users access to a selection of databases in relation to both UOC studies and interdisciplinary studies and, at the same time, guides, educates and assess users in their search. In addition, the Library has other reference tools not accessible from the Virtual Campus which are used to offer users help in their bibliographical search.
- Selected Information Diffusion (SID).
- Access to full text online databases.
- User training: Users of the UOC library receive three types of training: virtual training, training at the support centre libraries with specialised personnel and training during the attended meetings.
- Research support: It offers a wide support for researchers in information search, information management, publication support and evaluation support

8. Accessibility and Management of Learning

The UOC's Commitment to Accessibility

Since its beginnings, the UOC has been committed to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, and it therefore seeks to provide accessibility to the university for anyone who wants to be part of the various groups in our community (students, temporary lecturers, teaching staff and administration staff). In order to further its commitment with a guarantee of accessibility, the UOC has created the Accessibility Programme, to start-up and coordinate the implementation of the principles and action plans approved by the Executive Management Committee on this area. Consequently, this Programme will coordinate the activities of the following bodies:

- Accessibility Benchmarks
- Committee for Curricular Adaptation



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The Accessibility Benchmarks group is responsible for coordinating the tasks of the various teams and for exchanging information, and each benchmarked acts as liaison for their administration or study department. It is comprised of representatives of the administration and teaching staff teams.

The role of the Committee for Curricular Adaptation is the case-by-case resolution of significant curricular adaptations in cases of students where it is deemed necessary.

Adaptation Services

The UOC's mission is to ensure that everyone wishing to access lifelong learning can do so. This is why the UOC has devoted significant effort since its beginnings to providing access to the university for people with disabilities.

With the fundamental aim of meeting everyone's learning needs with maximum access to knowledge, the UOC offers an educational model based on personalisation and the permanent accompaniment of the student, beyond the limitations of time and space. It is, then, a model that intrinsically achieves high levels of equal opportunities in access to learning, added to which is the work required in meeting the needs of students with a disability.

The UOC has an Accessibility Programme to assist the coordination of all the work carried out both by the various administrative departments and by the academic departments to improve the university's accessibility.

Welcome and Monitoring

All students have a counsellor available to them who will take care of guiding and advising them on an individual basis from the moment they apply for admission to the university, prior to enrolment, until they graduate. This way, students with a disability can even get information about the type of support that they can expect from the university in every case before enrolling at the UOC for the first time.

Course Materials

The aim of the learning resources is to allow the student to study, whatever the circumstances in which they have to do so and irrespective of the setting in which they find themselves (library, public transport, home, etc.), the device they are using (PC, mobile, etc.) or the student's individual characteristics.

For this reason, we have worked on a number of projects that have enabled us to advance in the creation of materials in XML format, on the basis of which versions of the same content are generated in multiple formats, such as materials on paper, in PDF, HTML, karaoke, talking book, e-book. Each of these formats is designed for use at a specific time or in a specific situation, and we are working on ensuring that this range of possibilities is available for all subject materials. For example, the talking book is very interesting for meeting the needs of people with impaired vision, as the DAISY format that it uses makes it possible to work on the content in audio as though it were a book, turning pages or going on to the next chapter easily. The HTML version allows searches in the content of the material, while the PDF format offers automatic reading based on TTS tools (TextToSpeech).

We continue to research into creating new formats that adapt ever more precisely to the needs of the different students with the aim of developing into an increasingly more accessible and inclusive university. In any case, if a student finds that they cannot access any subject material, we try to adapt the format of the material as soon as possible so that the student can access its content.

Virtual Learning Environment

Work is underway to adapt the various interfaces of the Virtual Campus to comply with the w3c consortium's WAI AA standard, which is recommended to ensure ease of browsing on web interfaces for people with visual impairments.

On-Site Events

The UOC is a distance university where all teaching goes on using the communication and work tools provided by the Virtual Campus. There are, however, some on-site activities every semester. Some are



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voluntary, such as attending the graduation ceremony or the activities organised by the various centres, while others are compulsory, such as sitting the final assessment tests.

- Graduation ceremony and activities at the centres. Students with a disability can contact the UOC service in charge of organising these events to let it know of their needs. At the student's request, the necessary resources will be sought so that their attendance is as easy and satisfactory as possible. All requests are accepted. The services that can be requested include:
 - Ramps and adapted entrances
 - Reserved parking
 - Accompaniment during the event
 - Sign language interpreter
- On-site assessment tests: Students can find information at the campus secretary's office about the procedure to follow to request adaptations when taking the on-site tests. Students can request any type of adaptation, which will be granted as long as documentary evidence is provided. The following are the most frequently requested adaptations in the case of the on-site assessment tests:
 - Ramps and adapted entrances
 - Jaws or Zoomtext program
 - Texts in Braille
 - Take the tests with the help of a PC
 - Take oral tests
 - Adapted texts
 - More time to take the test

Significant Curricular Adaptations

At the request of the departments, the Committee for Curricular Adaptation assesses applications for any significant curricular adaptations that a student may require (modifications of the curriculum, the content or the learning methodology of any subject, the skill to be acquired by a student).

Other Accessibility Benefits

With regard to economic assistance, the UOC applies discounts to students with 33% or more degree of disability on official degree courses. Students should apply for the discount and provide documentary evidence when enrolling.

Besides this, the UOC fosters the signing of agreements with institutions and companies that work in the field of disabilities to favour the study conditions of their students with a disability (grants, free technology support products) and their socio-employment integration (practical placements, specific job offers). Similarly, we seek to sign agreements in order to make the advances made at the UOC in terms of the accessibility of its course materials available to people with a disability.

9. Learning Experience Evaluation

Evaluation During the Degree Programme

UOC has an integrated system for extracting and analyzing the outcomes of the teaching activity. This tool, called DAU (Data warehouse for UOC), transforms data taken from academic management systems and from the processes that collect satisfaction surveys, and makes them available to faculty at all levels: research, programme, course and classroom. This system, in use since the 2003/04 academic year, helps ensure the validity of the evaluation of each year's results, checks its evolution to monitor trends and, therefore, also helps evaluate the effectiveness of the improvement actions.

The Degree Committee receives each semester and at the end of each course corresponding results for the analysis and evaluation of programme development (academic results and satisfaction results) and periodically also the results of satisfaction of graduates and of their work integration. Then programme directors, after assessing the results with the Degree Committee and after evaluating the appropriate actions the Studies dean, promote the improvement actions annually to ensure a continuous improvement programme within the goal planning system emanating from the strategic planning of the University.



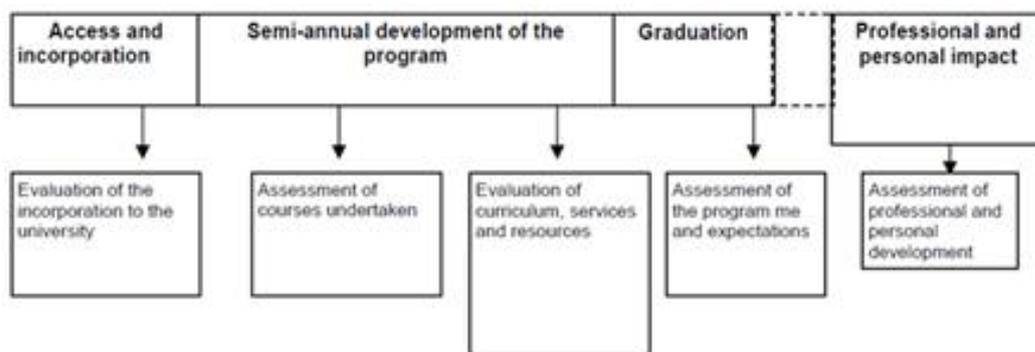
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Satisfaction Data Collection

UOC's Department of Planning and Quality ensures the collection of student satisfaction data. This area coordinates the design of questionnaires involving representatives of different interest groups, tracks participation, presents the results and produces reports for internal and external dissemination.

Collection of student satisfaction data

The basic mechanism to meet the satisfaction of students in relation to teaching and the various services offered by the University are surveys that are performed regularly and systematically. Each survey mainly assesses the satisfaction and fulfilment of expectations, with particular emphasis on key elements of the learning process and taking into account the different times of the academic life of the students: in the beginning, during the studies, during the graduation and post-graduation.



The University conducts an annual institutional survey that, among other things, addresses the degree of satisfaction of students towards the learning methodology, the guidance systems and the development of the counselling action and the university services. These reports are delivered to the Governing, Management and Studies Council, the Campus Committee, and the degree and quality committees. In these committees there are students representatives, faculty and management staff.

To know the satisfaction with the courses students fill in a biannual questionnaire that includes aspects of the development of lecturing: semester planning, consulting, and learning resources and assessment systems. The lecturers responsible for the courses receive the half-yearly survey results of these reports together with the results for each course. The learning outcomes are incorporated to these reports to facilitate evaluation. Programme managers receive the results, both the evaluation of the development of the semester and the results for each of the courses. Reports of the results are distributed to the Governing Council, to Management and to the Studies.

Evaluation of the Success of the Degree Programme

Procedures for analyzing graduates employment and satisfaction with training

UOC, which began operating during 1995/96, made a survey in 2005/06, when it was considered that there were a significant number of graduates, to know the impact, both professionally and personally, that graduating in this university has had to the graduates. The University performs a questionnaire to the students at the time of programme completion (graduation), to obtain results in relation to:

- level of satisfaction with the education received,
- intended continuation of education,
- professional expectations.

In addition, to be able to know the impact of training both in the professional level and at the level of new personal and professional competences, the University conducts a survey three or four years after the completion of the degree. The survey can be performed independently by the University, or in the framework of the study of the employment of people graduated in Catalan universities, a cross-sectional



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study coordinated by the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU). Participation in this study will provide comparative data with other Catalan universities.

- Professional improvement
- Professional satisfaction
- Satisfaction with the education received: suitability, applicability...
- Impact on skills acquisition
- Personal satisfaction

The results of these studies are globally analyzed and for each programme the results are disseminated to the committees mentioned above and the directors of studies and programmes. These results are valued primarily by the Degree Committee and are considered when making decisions regarding the design and operation of the programme.

Further development of the degree programme(s) – ongoing improvement

Each degree has a programme director, appointed by the Governing Council on a proposal from the Studies dean, who is responsible for coordinating the entire teaching process, the group of lecturers assigned to the degree and ultimately must ensure the quality of the education offer and guarantee the expected results in accordance with the set objectives.

The ultimate responsible for the quality that the student receives in each course falls to the lecturer responsible for the course (PRA). The lecturer ensures the quality and the updating of content and resources, with special attention to design and innovation ensuring the proper development of teaching and its relevance to the quality standards defined by the UOC. The lecturer designs the learning plan, plans the activity to be developed throughout the semester and reviews and assesses its implementation. It is the lecturer responsible for the course the one who leads and coordinates the team of collaborator lecturers. In its coordinating role, the lecturer tracks the activity of employees, ensuring the quality of the teaching carried out in the virtual classroom.

To ensure faculty coordination, programme director and lecturers responsible for courses meet regularly in order to analyze cross-cutting elements that may occur in related courses, both from the point view of competences and content.

Since the beginning of the course the student knows who the course lecturer and the programme principal are, can contact them by email to send his/her comments or suggestions about the course and expects to receive a reply via email. Students also can contact the student representatives to make their comments, who communicate regularly with the Studies dean to discuss complaints and suggestions from students.

Through these channels the lecturers responsible for the courses and programmes have continuous feedback from students.

10. Faculty Members

UOC faculty facilitates learning by helping and guiding students to make sure that their learning process is suited to their specific needs. Since UOC's goal is to ensure that students always have the necessary support and assistance, at the UOC students can find:

- Full-time faculty members: They are responsible for the academic aspects of organizing and operating one or more content areas and, especially, for coordinating with other lectures. They design courses and subjects and are responsible for their quality. They are about 250 full-time staff.
- Counsellors or part-time teachers: Their mission is to support students and offer guidance over the course. They monitor their transcript and are their liaisons for anything they need from the UOC that falls beyond the scope of a single subject. They are about 724, part-time staff, faculty of other universities and/or practitioners.
- Tutors: They oversee the learning process in the subjects taken, help students acquire the relevant skills and help them plan their time to meet their needs within a context of continuous learning. They are about 2000 people, part-time staff, faculty of other universities and/or practitioners.



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11. Community Engagement

UOC Alumni

UOC Alumni, the UOC graduate community, is a forum for knowledge, personal enrichment and lifelong learning based on a growing dynamic and networked community using information and communication technologies.

UOC Alumni is the initiative that aims to bring together and provide services to the University's graduate community. Its mission is to aid access to open, adaptable, flexible and continuous education. It acts as the catalyst for relations and communication, creating and strengthening the links between the UOC and its graduates; wherever they may be, whatever they may do professionally or socially.

Community members become a member of UOC Alumni when they complete their diploma, degree, postgraduate, master's degree or doctorate studies at the UOC. The UOC's commitment to its graduates does not come to an end when they gain their qualification: we are linked by a feeling of mutual belonging that lasts a lifetime. We will always be university students. It is a process that does not come to an end; instead, it is a state of mind that accompanies us throughout our lives. This is the lesson we have learned from our graduates and it is the value that the UOC Alumni network recognises in itself.

Graduates have shown that they are capable of overcoming obstacles, showing discipline and acquiring knowledge, and they are a reflection of the growing importance of ICTs, e-learning and the knowledge society. Joining UOC Alumni means maintaining the university spirit and forming part of a project that sees learning as a lifelong activity, an activity that affects their personal, professional and social life.

The following services are available to the alumnus of the UOC:

- Access to the Virtual Library
- Updated versions of teaching materials for classes they have taken.
- Access to conferences and activities.
- Discounted classes at the UOC.
- Alumni directory
- Reunions and meetings in their area
- Online UOC alumni group participation
- Access to job listings, offers and training
- Services for companies
- Use of regional centres, including room reservations, computer and Wi-Fi access, library support.
- Exclusive discounts with commercial partners.

Social Responsibility

The UOC's Development Cooperation office works to promote and aid university development corporation (UDC) and to contribute, as a university, to the human development of societies through teaching and research.

Despite the fact that the rise of the internet and ICT have created many new opportunities, there is still unequal access to education and knowledge around the world. This is why, alongside the University's internationalization strategy, the Development Cooperation office is making efforts to reduce the social and educational divide.

Faced with the new challenges set out in the United Nations' Development agenda beyond 2015, the University's mission is to aid access to higher education for everyone and break the vicious circle of inequality in order to bring about transformative change in society.

Some of the Development Cooperation office's main aims include:

- Ensure the institution's positioning respects the lines set for cooperation.
- Guarantee the transmission of cooperative values throughout the university community and society, providing a critical and transformative perspective.
- Promote cooperation as a key competence in the academic programmes.
- Foster social action and volunteering.
- Aid access to knowledge.



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- Stimulate relations and collaborations with bodies, institutions and NGOs that form part of the surrounding social fabric.
- Align the social action with the University Social Responsibility Master Plan.
- Monitor the research's social impact.



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- Support the search for funding for university development cooperation projects.

12. Research

The UOC's research, development and innovation activity is organised into 45 RDI groups linked to a department or to one of the University's two research centres: IN3 and the eLearn Center. Of these, 26 groups have been recognised by the Government of Catalonia in the last application round in 2014.

Research, basically carried out by lecturers, currently specialises in the fields of arts and humanities, social sciences, health sciences, technology and communications. In particular in: identity, culture, art and society; technology and social actions; globalisation, legal pluralism and human rights; fiscal studies, labour relations and social benefits; the Internet, digital technologies and new media; information and communications systems and services, and information and communications management. Two particularly important areas for the University's scientific activity must be highlighted: the information and knowledge society and virtual learning (e-learning).

As the UOC's research institute, IN3 focuses its activity on the interdisciplinary area of the information and knowledge society and supports a total of nineteen research groups. The eLC is an e-learning research, innovation and training centre essentially concerned with higher education and lifelong learning. As well as its individual members, a total of eleven research and innovation groups consisting of lecturers and management staff carry out their activities there. Around one hundred and fifteen people are currently linked to it.

As for the rest, there are fifteen formally constituted research groups, half of which are recognised by the Government of Catalonia, linked to UOC departments.

The UOC promotes the temporary incorporation of foreign lecturers and research staff in order to provide and exchange of experiences, ideas and views with experts in a particular area of knowledge. In this sense, the UOC's aim is to attract lecturers with recognised prestige for their teaching and/or research activity that have made outstanding contributions, who provide a new way of approaching specific knowledge and who stand out for their innovative spirit.

Receiving visiting lecturers leads to multiple enrichment. It enriches the lecturer who joins our institution because they have the chance to form part of a different university for a time, and it enriches UOC because we have the opportunity to learn and share experiences, to create new lines of research and also to consolidate and expand existing subject networks.

Institutes and Centres

An important part of the university's R+D+I activity is carried out through its two research centres: the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) and the eLearn Center.

The eLearn Center (eLC) is the UOC's e-learning research, innovation and training centre. Inspired by a network research model, the eLC facilitates the work and collaboration of teams, professionals and institutions from inside and outside the UOC to create more innovative ways of understanding and experiencing e-learning. The network of experts corresponds to the needs and requirements of virtual education, promotes innovative learning models and methodologies and improves the quality of e-learning. The eLC offers the PhD programme on education and ICT.

The Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) is a UOC research institute specialising in research on the network society and the knowledge economy, as well as studying network technologies and specific software areas. The IN3 offers the PhD programme on the information and knowledge society.

Innovation at the UOC

The UOC is an innovative university by nature and through conviction, taking up innovation as an identifying feature cutting across all its activities and processes. Innovation is part of the objectives of the different departments and areas making up its structure. The UOC promotes it through strategic projects and through periodic grant application procedures which bring out projects with impact on its teaching or management activities. The institution provides an environment where these ideas emerge and are collected, and provides the resources necessary to shape, develop and evaluate them. The University also ensures that mechanisms for publicising, continuing and developing them are provided.



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Turku University Experience

Quality Elements of Good Online Learning

- Learner-centered pedagogy: learning process, assignment, materials and interaction are designed according to the needs of the learner (as much as possible in the context of curriculum)
- Flexibility: online participation is an option for those who cannot attend events like lectures (lecture-recording, web-meetings, asynchronous interaction)
- Teacher support: there is support available for teachers in the course design and teaching online, teamwork is recommended

Key Trends and Important Developments According to Horizon 2014

- Integration and use of Social media -> learning environment of experts and expertise
- Data-driven learning & assessment -> automatization when possible, teacher lead interaction at higher level of cognitive levels
- Integration of online, hybrid, and collaborative learning in f-2-f instruction

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