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5 Benchlearning

- Korkeakoulun itsearviointi

Benchlearning exercise in EUTOPIA – Quality assurance and joint programmes

During the Fourth EUTOPIA WEEK, an online workshop called “The Future of the EUTOPIA Quality Assurance System” was held on November 25, 2021. All EUTOPIA universities participated, apart from Dresden University of Technology.

The following topics were covered:

1. The quality assurance (QA) systems of EUTOPIA universities (national framework and university QA),
2. The QA of joint programmes and other transnational educational programmes at EUTOPIA universities,
3. Future QA (in general), and the QA of EUTOPIA learning communities and other educational programmes.

The aim of the workshop was to get an overview of general QA at EUTOPIA higher education institutions (HEIs), the QA of education, and the QA processes used in joint programmes or examples of other transnational educational programmes.

The exercise demonstrated and confirmed previous analyses of the systems of EUTOPIA QA, and thus that all partner universities have successfully undergone external QA processes based on the ESG principles. Although this should not be confused with the assumption of largely consistent internal QA systems, it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that the core features of

internal QA in teaching and learning are implemented in similar ways. All cooperating HEIs apply regular monitoring systems, which differ in technical aspects of organisation and duration. A more relevant difference relates to the subject matter, and the great majority of HEIs focus on study programmes, while one HEI focuses on the relevant institutional measures to monitor the quality of the learning process.

Connected Learning Communities

One of EUTOPIA's innovations is the Connected Learning Communities (CLCs) based on an innovative educational model. EUTOPIA CLCs offer a range of learning formats through curricular and co-curricular activities: peer feedback sessions, negotiation simulations, online experiments and debates, student-led research projects, problem-based learning, module design, and the organisation of cross-campus research seminars. The activities are performed synchronously and asynchronously. So far EUTOPIA has developed 30 CLCs. In total, approximately 44 employees from 17 UL Members actively participate in 23 CLCs. Each CLC goes through a three-year development cycle. The majority of these CLCs are still operational, and at the UL we are fostering their future development and taking steps to make them sustainable. We do this by employing a local facilitator who supports already existing CLCs as well as onboarding new ones. To date, approximately 300 students from the UL have been involved in the activities offered by the CLCs over the past three years.

The aim is to establish sustainable CLCs. We will support the incorporation of CLCs in various curricula. Additionally, we will support the inclusion of micro-credentials for students who are involved in CLCs. One current limitation is the lack of acknowledgement and additional support for the participation of academic staff in CLCs. At present, some UL Members are better supported with access to various grants that support EUTOPIA activities, such as visits to partner institutions by academic staff and students. The function of the local facilitator is to improve these opportunities across all member faculties with the support of project offices.

In the light of their previous collaboration as partners in CLCs in Artificial Intelligence, the UL and Pompeu Fabra University agreed to establish a new joint programme in Artificial Intelligence under the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMAI).

The UL, together with VUB and UoW, representing EUTOPIA, recently joined the SMARTT project (Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming HE international programmes) as an associate partner, whose main objectives are to screen, test and make recommendations on the criteria for awarding a European Degree Label to improve quality and increase transferability.

Key conclusions of the workshop

EUTOPIA pursues its strategic goals and is increasingly critical to QA's internal organisational success, particularly as it relates to the future development and sustainability of CLCs. The goal of providing a new methodology that combines the qualities of the learning and research organisation and knowledge management is critical to further developments in this context.

The governance of EUTOPIA provides us with the opportunity to establish predominantly application-oriented approaches as a ‘new’ concept of accountability in EUTOPIA’s own internal QA system. EUTOPIA builds on a process of the much deeper integration of partner universities. As integration continues incrementally, this starting point in terms of QA is important because two perspectives converge:

- the perspective of a development project with specific goals and milestones that require a project management approach and have the character of QA with regard to the results; and
- the perspective of an institution in transition, starting with the processes of affiliated communities as the core of a new institutional approach.

Good practices of UL	**Good practices of the partners**
– Finding financial resources to support CLCs. – Cooperation with international offices at the majority of UL Members.	– Better promotion of the alliance among staff and students. – Including activities as part of the curriculum. – Offering micro-credentials for participation.

Good practices of the benchlearning partners to be applied at UL

– Establishment of new joint master’s programme on Artificial Intelligence (as part of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programme).
– Offering resources (a part-time teaching assistant) and additional administrative support to the Connected Learning Communities (CLCs) UL leads.
– Establishing the transfer of knowledge from the CLCs that have already finished the three-year development cycle to new CLCs in development.

Audit team's comments

The UL chose quality assurance and joint programmes as the focus of benchlearning and the EUTOPIA network as a partner. Benchlearning was organised as a workshop in November 2023, in which all EUTOPIA partner universities participated. The UL’s active membership in EUTOPIA, the European University Alliance, underpins its commitment to fostering collaborative academic ventures. The engagement within educational consortiums, such as EUTOPIA, is commendable, reflecting the UL’s commitment to developing connected learning frameworks and embracing collaborative research. The alliance, which is instrumental in developing joint educational offers, provides the UL with a platform to both contribute to and benefit from a synergised European educational landscape. Being part of an alliance places the UL in a strategically advantageous position to access resources, networks, and opportunities that can substantively enhance its joint educational offerings and collaborative research ventures.

The UL confirmed that partner universities in the EUTOPIA network have successfully undergone external quality assurance (QA) processes based on ESG principles, while noting that internal QA

systems may vary. The universities employ regular monitoring systems, with variations in organisation and duration, primarily focusing on study programmes. During the review it became evident that the monitoring and evaluation of the connected learning communities could benefit from a more systematic and cross-institutional approach.

The goal of the UL is to create connected learning communities (CLCs) and integrate them into different curricula. They also plan to introduce micro-credentials for students engaged in community learning centres. The review members raised the challenge that there is unequal support for academic staff in CLCs, with some UL faculties and academies having better access to grants for EUTOPIA activities. To enhance the opportunities for all members, the local facilitator's role could be strengthened with project office support.

According to the audit visit, some students reported that the study credits awarded in EUTOPIA activities are not recognised by all faculties. To increase the attractiveness and to ensure the sustainability of the programme, plans to ensure the transferability of credits gained through the EUTOPIA network are recommended. Students participating in EUTOPIA learning communities must be selected based on equal opportunities and transparent procedures, including transparent student selection criteria.