
Round table: Quality of eLearning - Guidelines and Recommendations of Western Balkan Working Group for Improving DL in Higher Education

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ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF DISTANCE LEARNING
AT WESTERN BALKAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



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Tempus Project

Enhancing the Quality of Distance Learning at
Western Balkan Higher Education Institutions
University of Kragujevac, Serbia



Present:

Prof. Srdjan Stankovic, National Council for Higher Education, Serbia, president

Prof. Dragan Domazet, Metropolitan University

Prof. Danijela Milosevic, University of Kragujevac

Prof. Radojka Krneta, University of Kragujevac

Prof. Milena Stankovic, University of Nis

Prof. Djordje Jovanovic, National Council for Education, Montenegro

Prof. Suzana Loshkovska, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje

Professor Domazet, as host, after a short introduction, gave the word to professor Milošević.

Professor Milošević expressed her hope that the final project results would be presented on the next eLearning conference. She pointed out that the team originated from three countries, gathered for task of improvement the current practice of e-learning and distance learning. Gathered people came from universities, national councils for accreditation and ministries. It is stated that main discussion topics were current activities and that main questions and dilemmas were about to be risen in order of hearing auditory comments and ideas.

It is said that EU partners were engaged on project with task of transferring their knowledge and experience from national level in area of regulations. It is confirmed that the conclusion was to put the awareness of the quality in first place.

The representatives from Montenegro and FYR Macedonia shared preview of the current situation in their countries.

Prof. Djordje Jovanovic pointed out the importance of the project because of lack of any regulative in this field in Montenegro. The council would wait the final documents to be ready in order to incorporate them into regulations. He described the project as extremely serious and potentially fruitful for all countries involved.

Suzana Loshkovska presented herself as being only one participant, coming from SS Cyril and Methodius, having other institutions from Macedonia also included, such as University FON and Ministry of education. The situation in FYR Macedonia was described as similar to Montenegrin. Nevertheless, some universities had been offering distance learning programs, accredited only as standard study programs.

Prof. Milošević stated that the project team was quite aware of its possibilities and that the present regulations could not be rewritten, so the first efforts were made in direction of enhancing the awareness. The set of three main goals was yielded: first was the development and improvement of accreditation process, second was setting the development guidelines for distance learning at university level and the third one was development of documentation for the accreditation body. The job should be done by spring 2013.

Prof. Milena Stanković, as a working package coordinator, introduced details of the work in progress. She pointed out a few issues that were still in discussion phase: teacher competencies, its dimensions (methodology, scientific, specific distance learning competencies) and ways of their metrics. Additionally, issue of measuring teacher workload was mentioned as important one.

Professor Milena stated her team's good collaboration with University of Macerata in job of preparing materials, assessment organization and quality assurance.

Prof. Milošević gave the word to heads of working groups.

Prof. Radojka Krneta, as coordinator of group dealing with improvement of regulatory documents at institution level, expressed groups intention to create a kind of guidelines for organization of DL studies at University of Kragujevac. The documents tackling the issue of infrastructure for DL, university management role, introduction of DL at institution level, teacher competences, user evaluation, assessment and evaluation had been under development.

Prof. Milošević mentioned that the day before there was a long discussion about competences, focused around question: is it necessary to require DL competences, when nobody do that for classical teaching. It is stated that experiences from University of Macerata, having over a thousand students and the e-tutor role, were up to be used. An e-tutor course based on Macerata official training, was supposed to be made available through the BADEN network to all interested teachers, as optional.

Prof. Domazet shared experiences of the Metropolitan university, where they had standard roles of teacher (creating content) and teaching assistant (communicating with students, conducting assessments), but the approach had been reconsidered. Instead of having quality check at the end of the year, checking the learning material, the quality assurance mechanisms are going to be implemented a priory. Many participants would be included and the process was supposed to be project oriented. Main motive for the shift is increasing number of students.

Professor Domazet raised the question of teacher/tutors competencies in situation where many of them were included in the teaching process. An idea was set to have certified tutors. He added that students had to be protected from non-quality on the education market, also by introducing quality labels.

Professor Srdjan Stankovic stated the Serbian National council should had been more engaged in the project and could help more. He added that council was preparing an obligational minimal criteria for teaching staff in higher education, and proposals to the universities were up to be sent. He expressed his uncertainty of incorporating recommendations for DL in general ones.

Professor Domazet claimed that universities should collaborate with authorities and possibly introduce a global quality label.

Professor Milošević cleared out that the eprobate label was purely international, just offered through BADEN for the language issues, and that certified reviewers should be included in the official review process, as consultants or trainers.

"Regarding the reviewers, we want to involve experts in e-learning in the review process." - she said.

Professor Milena Stankovic stated that the problem of competences was tough to be solved at state university.

Professor Domazet disagreed and said that the National Council in his opinion was very open to hear suggestions from all universities, not matter of being state or private. He claimed that required standards should not be too high.



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Prof. Djordje Jovanovic agreed that reviewers should be qualified for DL.

In the following discussion, there was told that the number of enrolled students should be reconsidered. Same issues are reported in other countries, such as Slovenia.