Impact of the QAinAL project on EPOKA University

The most important impact that the QAinAL project has had at EPOKA University is that it has greatly contributed to further raising awareness on quality assurance (QA) procedures, mechanisms and documents among the managing, academic and administrative staff members. Throughout the project duration, 35 full-time academic staff members (representing 50% of the overall number of full-time academic staff members), 34 administrative staff members (95% of the overall number of administrative staff members) and 3 research assistants (representing 50% of the overall number of research assistants) as well as 5 students engaged in the QA bodies and processes have participated in the study visits, training seminars and workshops, and have also been actively involved in the other activities implemented in the framework of the QAinAL project.

The impact of the QAinAL project in further raising awareness on QA issues has been complemented by the conduct of institutional periodical re-accreditation and the periodical re-accreditation of 7 Bachelor and 12 Master's study programs by the Albanian Agency on Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ASCAL (*formerly, Albanian Public Agency on the Accreditation of Higher Education - APAAL*) which coincided with the QAinAL project duration. A substantial part of the staff members who were members of the Self-Evaluation Groups established at the institution- and Department-level have also been directly involved in QAinAL study visits, training seminars and workshops, thus enabling them to get acquainted with the best practices and procedures implemented at other partner universities.

The information and experience gained during the study visits, training seminars and workshops conducted in the framework of the QAinAL project has also greatly helped the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board at EPOKA University to develop a more detailed definition of tasks for the Internal Quality Assurance Office (IQAO) as an administrative unit operating under the AEQI Board.

In fact, in the aftermath of the conduct of a very detailed Needs and Analysis Questionnaire at the beginning of the project implementation on QA structures and processes at each partner institution, EPOKA University developed a very detailed SWOT analysis of the QA structures and processes, which further led to the preparation of a detailed job description for the Quality Assurance Officer and to a further clarification of the division of duties and responsibilities between the AEQI Board and the IQAO.

The abovementioned activities under QAinAL have also brought to the attention of the decision-making authorities and bodies at EPOKA University the importance of having a full-time staff member being responsible for the daily operations of the IQAO, instead of a part-time staff member as was the situation from October 2014 when the IQAO was established until May 2017. As of May 2017, a full-time staff member has been appointed as Quality Assurance Officer at IQAO.

The information and documents received in the framework of the QAinAL project have also provided a very valuable input to the work currently being conducted at EPOKA University with regard to the amending of the regulations, directives and standard operating procedures at the University in compliance with the provisions of the new 2015 Higher Education Law despite the delay in the adoption by the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Albania of the new sub-legal acts that will ensure the proper implementation of the new Higher Education Law.

Pursuant to the new Statute of EPOKA University which entered into force as of April 2017, upon its approval by the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Albania, the AEQI Board was re-organized into a Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA) through the Decisions of the Academic Senate No. 05 and 06, dated 27.12.2017.

It should also be mentioned that all staff members and students who have acted as members of the AEQI Board and after the re-organization of the latter, as members of the PCQA, as well as the Quality Assurance Officer have received extensive training through the participation in the study visits, training programs and workshops conducted in the framework of the QAinAL project.

In this framework, the draft containing the amendments to the Directive of EPOKA University "On Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement" has been prepared by directly making use of the valuable documents received during the QAinAL project and it will be approved by the Academic Senate in its meeting dated March 06, 2019.

Through the equipment purchased in the framework of the QAinAL project, starting from the 2017-2018 academic year, a new Computer Lab started to be extensively used in the undergraduate and graduate classes of Engineering courses, alongside the existing three Computer Labs. The Lab is equipped with hardware which enables high standards of teaching and learning. The new Computer Lab will also be used in the training programs for the administrative staff as well as third parties.

At the same time, a state-of-the art videoconferencing system was purchased and installed in the framework of the QAinAL project, enabling the streaming live of conferences, meetings, courses and other videos around the world.

Furthermore, the following fundamental documents have been prepared and/or updated by receiving extensive feedback and input from the EU partner institutions in the framework of the QAinAL project:

1. *QA Strategy as part of the Strategic Plan of EPOKA University 2018-2022;*
2. *QA Action Plan;*
3. *QA Manual;*
4. *Standard Operating Procedures of units.*

All these documents – which have been approved by the respective decision-making bodies at EPOKA University – will serve as basic documents that will guide the work of all units and staff members on QA-related issues in the forthcoming years and will act as key documents that will

ensure the sustainability of the QAinAL project results at EPOKA University in the mid-term period.