

QAinAL



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Project name: **“Strategic Support on Strengthening the Quality Assurance Structures at the Private Higher Education Institutions in Albania”**

Project acronym: **QAinAL**

Project no. **561510-EPP-1-2015-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

Summary of the Brainstorming session (March 1, 2016 afternoon session) and of the Minutes of Project Consortium Meeting (March 2, 2016)

Held in the frame of the Kick – Off Meeting
February 29 – March 2, 2016

Venue:

*EPOKA University
Rr. Tiranë-Rinas, Km. 12
Tirana/ALBANIA*



1. SUMMARY OF THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION (afternoon session March 1, 2016)

The aim of the brainstorming session was to find out about the expectations of the higher education institutions in Albania from the project, by matching the needs with previous and current initiatives. The session was lead by Prof. Dr. Agostino Massa.

Based on the brainstorming session, the expectations of the Higher Education Institutions in Albania from the project can be summarized as follows:

- Challenges from the implementation of new Law on Higher Education in Albania. In this regard the new requirement in the Law is the division between the Academic and Administrative boards. In this regard in one of the upcoming trainings/workshops/events to discuss about "How can the HEI ensure efficient, effective cooperation among the administrative and academic boards?";
- Quality assurance of international cooperation;
- Evaluation of research (system and procedures);
- Introduction on Quality Assurance of Joint Degrees;
- Development of internal self-assessment reports (experiences from the EU project partners);
- How to develop an effective internal quality assurance system; Translation of national requirements (from Law on HE, Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education of Albania) into the daily work of QA office (development of procedures, guidelines etc.);
- Quality assurance of study programs (use of questionnaires, hard copy vs. electronic)
- Further practice sharing by the EU project partners on targeted contracts;
- The instruments for evaluation of teaching; How to structure the surveys (for students, for the labour market etc.)?
- Optimization procedures definition to be further explained by the EU partners.
- Further discussions on: Quality Assurance vs. Quality Improvement vs. Quality Control.

This session was organized as a complementary measure to the needs and analysis activities which are carried in out in the frame of WP 1 and WP 2. Another important note made by most of the project partners (especially partners from previous project) is that documents from other projects to be shared with the project partners, as well.



2. MINUTES OF THE PROJECT CONSORTIUM MEETING, MARCH 2, 2016

Preventive Monitoring Meeting, of *Albanian Erasmus + Office* was combined with Project Consortium Meeting. The Albanian ERASMUS+ Office will send a separate report.

The following issues were discussed in the Consortium Meeting:

1. Summary of the project feedback by the European Commission;
2. Guidelines for the Use of the Grant
3. Partnership agreements
4. Dissemination activities
5. Setting up the Quality & Management boards
6. Activities for the 1st year of the project

1. Addressing the project feedback of the European Commission:

- **Needs of the Private Higher Education Institutions:** The project is designed in the way to allow that the project responds to the actual needs of the private higher education institutions. It is clear also from the conducted needs and analysis report that the requirements are different across the institutions, in this context the project will establish / strengthen the QA structures depending on the institutional needs.
- **Funding:** It is clear that the private higher education institutions of Albania do not have a large possibility of access on funding (beside ERASMUS+ Programme) that support development activities to enhance their internal / external quality assurance and other aspects of teaching, learning, research and enhancing of the student support services. In this regard there is no other possibility of funding for a similar project, beside ERASMUS+. As the Ministry of Education and Sport of Albania is partner in the project, and there will be any relevant call for the HEIs it will be shared by MES.
- **Budget transfer from Preparation WP to Development WPs:** The project grant-holder will re-allocate part of the budget from preparation to development activities (applicable for all partners).
- **Contingency Plan:** With regard to the requirement of having developed a Contingency Plan in advance, the project consortium considers that only during the project implementation we can identify the obstacles and always act accordingly.
- **Involvement of the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Albania (PAAHEIA):** The project consortium has been informed by the project grant-holder that the PAAHEI has been invited last year to be part of the project. The response by the PAAHEI was delayed,

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and they did not send a Mandate Letter, which is compulsory by the rules of the ERASMUS+ Program to formalize involvement of a partner in the project. PAAHEI was again approached, before the kick – off meeting, in February 2016, by informing them that the project has been granted from the European Commission and were invited for a presentation. Mr. Tildi Cadri, Head of Evaluation and Promotion Department at PAAHEI, sent a reply by asking for further information with regard to the project and involvement of PAAHEI. All the information was forwarded to the PAAHEI, and they were informed that it is important that they participate in the kick – off meeting and we further discuss the involvement of PAAHEI in the project (as a new partner, or?). Anyway, although the PAAHEI did not participate in the project kick – off meeting, all of the consortium members agreed to include the PAAHEI as a new partner. On the other hand, also the response by the PAAHEI should be positive to be able to include them in the project?! National ERASMUS+ in Albania will get in touch with the PAAHEI and explain again the project and the whole situation. Anyway, Ministry of Education and Sport underlined that they cannot force the institutions to become partner in a project.

- **Leading the WPs:** The consortium members have agreed for the following changes on WP leading

WP 1	Preparation phase	WUS KS, XK
WP 2	Establish/support the quality assurance structures	PLUS, AT and EPOKA, AL
WP 3	Equipment purchase	PLUS, AT and all PHEI in AL (EPOKA, UET, UMB, UNYT, U_POLIS)
WP 4	Trainings at all levels	UPB, RO and UET, AL
WP 5	Action plans for the institutions on QA	UNIGE, IT and UMB, AL
WP 6	Quality Control	PLUS, AT and WUS Kosova, XK (and PAAHEI if becomes a partner)
WP 7	Dissemination	PLUS, AT, WUS Kosova, XK and UNYT
WP 8	Project Management	PLUS, AT and all project partners
WP 9	Sustainability	MES and U_POLIS

Communication Plan: In order to reinforce the communication obviously seen as not sufficient the following changes are supposed and decided upon by the committee: written reports every 3 months by the PHEI in AL; every 6 months the grant-holder will visit the partners, and there will be skype conferences in between.

It has been highlighted by the Albanian ERASMUS+ Office, that if the visibility is not conducted according to the rules of the EC, the penalty that might be applied is up to 20%.



Languages of the webpage: The project consortium has approved the proposal of EC to have a bilingual webpage in English and Albanian. Further to this all the presentations in the Albanian section of the project webpage will be available in the same language. Each presentation by the Kosovar and Albanian partners will be prepared in Albanian and English, whereas the presentations of the EU project partners will be translated by the PHEI in AL.

Sustainability & impact of the project: Dissemination package foresees dissemination through multiplication. In this regard it has been discussed and decided by the Project Consortium that after each study visit and training the participants have internal dissemination activities in their own institution with relevant staff (and students if appropriate). This has to be documented with Agenda, List of Participants and Minutes (if relevant). All the materials of the study visits and trainings can be used for the internal dissemination events.

It has been mentioned by the project partners that staff fluctuation might be one of the reasons, which might contribute to the discontinuity of the activities or a specific initiative in all of the respective institutions. Thus, it has been recommended that the PHEI of AL to the best possible extent sends staff to the trainings, workshops and study visits who are motivated and are linked to the institution in a mid-term and long-term period, in order that the project yields its best results.

Furthermore, by considering that the topic of Quality Assurance is a national priority of the Higher Education System of Albania, sustainability of the project results are not doubted.

2. Guidelines for the Use of the Grant: The staff costs rates and the limits for travel costs and costs of stay were briefly discussed. For further information the Guidelines for the Use of the Grant have been distributed to all the partners;

3. Partnership agreements: The signing of Partnership Agreements should be completed by April 5th. The current form of the partnership agreements foresees a contract based on reimbursement of real costs or pre-finance based on installments. Partnership agreements with all its annexes (including Grant Agreement of the PLUS with the EC), will be sent to all the project partners after being finalized by PLUS. All the partners will put its Bank details, and send back the three signed by the legal representative and stamped originals to the address of PLUS.

4. Dissemination activities:

The Dissemination work-package foresees: Dissemination through webpage; Dissemination through multiplication; Dissemination through other events and activities.



a. Dissemination through webpage;

The project webpage will be set-up and functionalized by end of April. Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter will be part of the webpage. In order to make the webpage more attractive it has been agreed that the project partners share their important events and activities related to quality assurance in the project webpage, as well (beside the project related news). Related to language please see the upper parts.

Furthermore, the project events will be shared also on the institutional webpage of all project partners. It has been advised that the current Project Fact Sheet can be used to put the information online in the webpages of the partner institutions.

b. Dissemination through multiplication: Please see the upper parts.

c. Dissemination through events and other activities: During the course of the project, partners will identify events to present the project and its main results.

5. Setting up the Quality & Management boards:

5.1 Management Board: It has been agreed that members of the Management Board, are the contact persons of all institutions. Project Management Board is responsible for overall project implementation and will decide on different management issues related to the project including recommendations given by the Quality Board.

5.2 Quality Board, Setting-up a Quality Board in the project, has not been accepted quite well by the project partners. In the beginning of the discussion there were misunderstandings with regard to its role, and also if there should be another body that controls Project Management Board, or give recommendations?

Some of the project partners tried to share the experiences that work quite well in different projects (for example implemented in Kosova), and many times some recommendations that are given in Quality Board are quite welcome and sometimes their vision might go beyond the Project Management Board. It was mentioned that it does not require extra costs for such a Board, as its meetings can be planned in the frame of the trainings, study visits and workshops, as well as using cheap ways of communications (Skype).

After some further discussion, it was agreed that the Quality Board is comprised of the following institutions:

- Kosova: Pjeter Budi (Evljana Berani)
- All 5 PHEI in Albania



- University Politechnica in Bucharest (Prof. Mocanu)
- WUS Kosova

All the institutions will send the names by **March 11, 2016**, and they should be different from Project MNGT Board.

6. Activities for the 1st year of the project: Please see the separate document, activities for the 1st year. Important highlights:

Study visit (1.6 activity) and workshop in Bucharest: There were several proposals on the dates. UPB will doodle the event, and all the partners can confirm their availability.

Equipment purchase: By considering all of the past experiences with the projects, equipment purchase is an activity that takes longer to be completed because of the many procedures and rules that should be met. In this regard, the activities for the equipment purchase will start after finalization of the contracting procedures, in April 2016.

Important information related to equipment purchase.

- VAT cost (is ineligible according to ERASMUS+), while according to the rules in Albania it cannot be exempted. In this regard, Ministry of Finance, Albania should provide a letter
- Certificate of Origin does not apply anymore.