



European University Quality in eLearning

INFORMATION PACKAGE



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"The UNIQUe Project Consortium would like to recognize the input from the following institutions in the development of the UNIQUe label:

the **Massive Project** (FIM-new learning, Tavistock Institute, School of Education - University of Edinburgh, SCIENTER, Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem, University of Bergen, University of Barcelona, Sociedad Digital de Autores y Editores -sDae, Scienter España, EuroPACE ivzw) and

the **CEL Accreditation** (EFMD, Swiss Center for Innovations in Learning (SCIL) University of St. Gallen, SPIRUS Applied Learning Solutions AG)"

The Uniqueness of UNIQUE

The aim of the UNIQUE approach is to support institutions of higher education to measure how successful they are in technology-enhanced learning and to allow for continuous improvement.

- UNIQUE is an accelerator for quality improvement and innovation. Providing industry-wide benchmarks, it will dramatically enhance the implementation speed of the Bologna reforms in the area of technology-enhanced learning.
- Compared to other quality initiatives in the area of technology-enhanced learning, UNIQUE has a broader institutional approach and is not only related to eLearning. The Unique quality label builds on the broadest stakeholder involvement.
- The UNIQUE process is structured in six very distinct stages and offers a formalised approach in each of the steps.
- The UNIQUE quality label provides an accreditation as a result, next to continuous quality improvement mechanisms.
- The UNIQUE quality label focuses on innovation. UNIQUE ensures continuous quality improvement since it is a diagnostic tool for self-assessment of the institution.

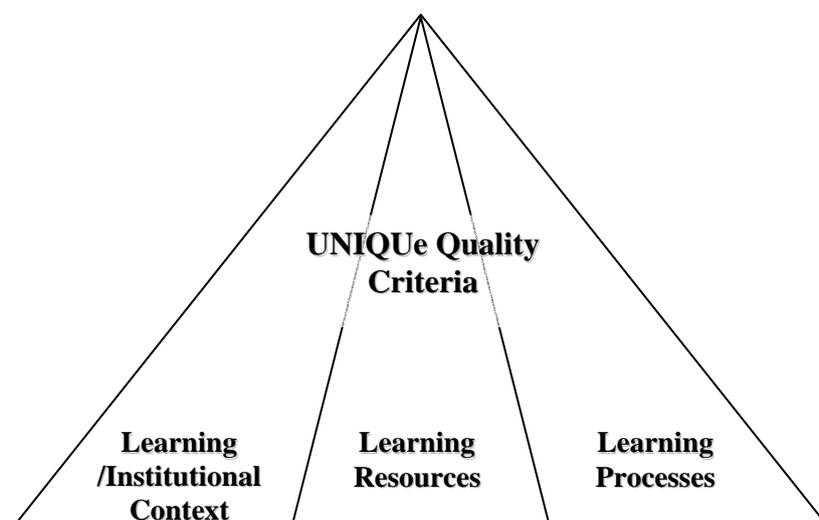
UNIQUE Quality Criteria

The quality of both products and programmes in the field of technology-enhanced learning varies widely. The UNIQUE quality label is a unique concept of quality improvement which is theoretically sound and at the same time is meeting the expectations of practice.

A varied range of approaches for assuring quality in eLearning is available. Some of the existing initiatives focus heavily - if not solely - on on-line instructional design. Aspects such as technology, usability, accessibility cannot be overestimated in the context of technology-enhanced learning. However, even the most sophisticated approaches in these areas will not guarantee quality improvement for technology-enhanced learning initiatives.

Any worthwhile eLearning initiative will have to meet high quality standards for programme objective, programme structure, content, resources and learning processes. However, a high-level learning experience can only be guaranteed if and when the offering institution is top-level quality.

UNIQUE is aimed at the institutional accreditation of universities for outstanding work in the use of ICT-based learning. Its quality label can be articulated in three areas: resources, processes and context. The UNIQUE quality criteria break down as follows:



LEARNING / INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

- STRATEGY AND eLEARNING
- COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION, (culture, R&D)
- OPENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

LEARNING RESOURCES

- RESOURCES FOR LEARNING
- STUDENTS
- UNIVERSITY STAFF
- TECHNOLOGY EQUIPMENT

LEARNING PROCESSES

- QUALITY OF THE OFFER (e.g. catalogues and services, learning organisation)
- IPR MANAGEMENT
- PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT/ HR DEVELOPMENT

UNIQUE Process for Accreditation

The UNIQUE process is structured in six very distinct stages and offers a formalised approach in each of the steps:

- 0 - Inquiry
- 1 - Application
- 2 - Eligibility
- 3 - Self-Assessment
- 4 - Peer Review
- 5 - Awarding Body
- 6 - Continuous Quality Improvement

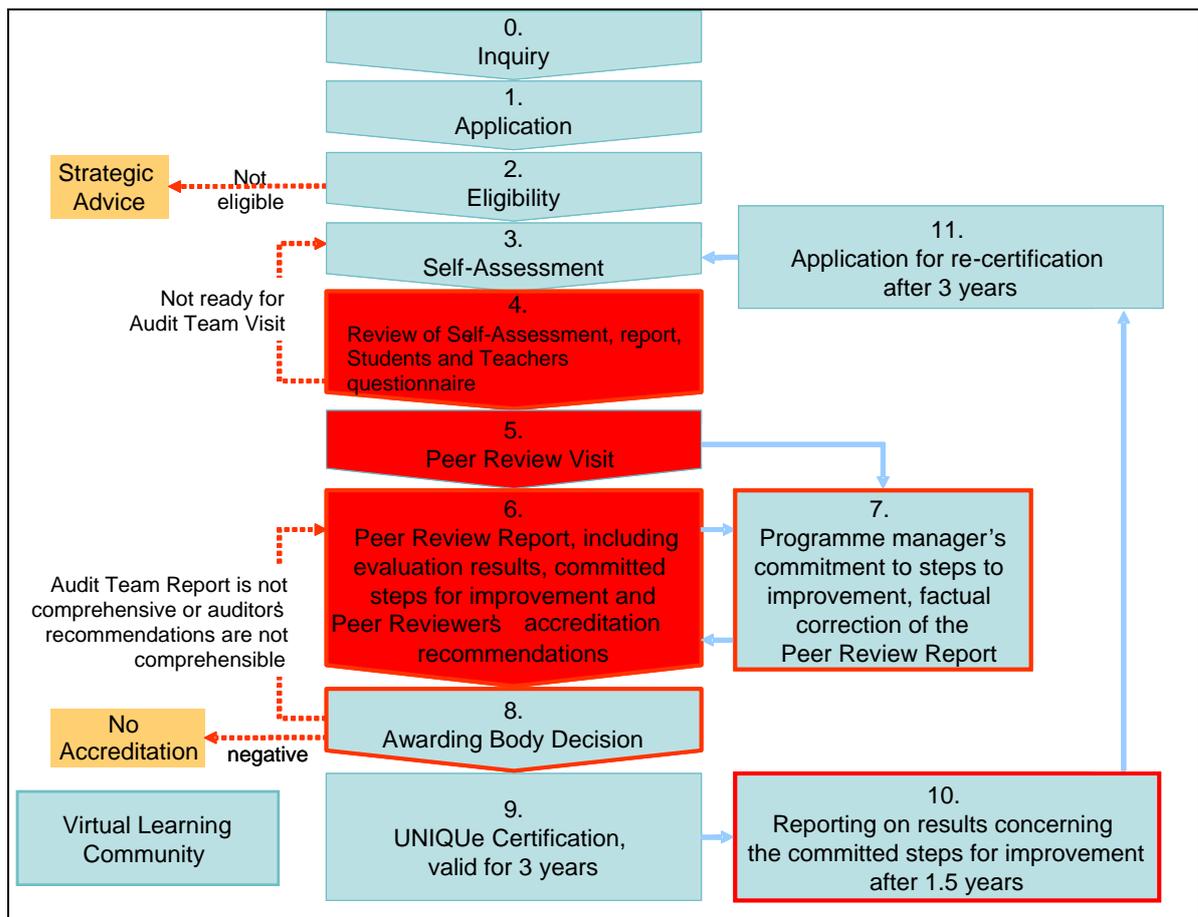
0. Inquiry

This is the first contact between the institution that wants to submit for UNIQUE accreditation. The UNIQUE Executive Office (UEO) will inform the institution about the process and will answer questions that the institution may have in this respect.

At the institution's request, a standard package of information will be sent to them describing UNIQUE in more detail. By formally applying to enter into the process, an institution implicitly acknowledges that it has read the documents in the standard UNQe package.

1. Application

Application to UNIQUE requires the submission to the UNIQUE Executive Office of a completed application data sheet which can be downloaded from the UNIQUE website: <http://unique.europace.org/>. The data sheet is a short questionnaire that provides basic factual information about the university and allows a preliminary formal assessment of the university's quality in comparison with the UNIQUE quality criteria.



Graph based on a design by Markus Wirth for the CEL accreditation scheme (2006).

Concerning language issues and how to compose the team in respect to the language, the documents will be written and issued in English, and the universities should provide translators during the peer review/auditing if necessary.

2. Eligibility

Being declared eligible signifies that:

- the application has been formally accepted;
- UNIQUE will work with the institution towards the twin objectives of quality improvement and future accreditation.

It is important to note that the declaration of eligibility to enter the process does not constitute any guarantee or any formal prediction of the university's ultimate success in achieving accreditation.

After being declared eligible, a briefing session takes place by phone and will be done by the UNIQUE Executive Office. Under exceptional circumstances, the briefing session may take place by means of a one-day visit to the institution.

The UNIQUE team recommends the visit as the preferred option but it is up to the university to choose to host the preliminary visit or not.

The UNIQUE Supervisory Board will declare an institution eligible to begin the UNIQUE quality improvement and accreditation process if it can demonstrate that it satisfies the preliminary conditions. This screening process is designed to ensure that a university:

- falls within the scope of the UNIQUe scheme;
- has technology-enhanced learning initiatives;
- has a reasonable prospect of satisfying the UNIQUe criteria within 3 years.

If a university is declared eligible, it is free to advance on to Stage 3 of the UNIQUe accreditation process: Self- Assessment (SA).

The institution has three months to prepare a Self-Assessment Report (SAR).

3. Self-Assessment

During the eligibility briefing, the institution will be advised on how to initiate the Self-Assessment (SA) process. The aim of this advice is to ensure that the university's management understands what is expected and how best to proceed.

The university management carries out an extensive self-evaluation and drafts a Self-Assessment Report (SAR).

The SAR is intended to be self-critical rather than promotional, and analytical as well as descriptive. The objective of the Self-Assessment and the accompanying report is to assist in the UNIQUe accreditation process and support the work of the audit team.

This self-evaluation process is designed to help the university management gain a clearer understanding of its strategic position by assessing its strengths and weaknesses, by measuring the principal constraints and opportunities determined by its environment, and by looking realistically at the coherence between its ambition and its resources. The process is also designed to lead the institution to judge the overall effectiveness of its own processes.

This stage of the accreditation process is expected to take between three to six months, but the duration is up to the institution. During this period, the university management may request advice and assistance in preparing its SAR.

Four copies of the Self-Assessment Report written in English are required and should be submitted to the UNIQUe Executive Office.

The Self-Assessment stage is a critical step in the accreditation process. The UNIQUe key criteria against which the Self-Assessment Report will be written are found at <http://unique.europace.org/>. This analysis becomes a critical guide in the peer review stage of the process.

The Self-Assessment process should become an integral part of the school's quality system to lay out the basis for further quality improvement.

The Self-Assessment process requires the establishment of a continuous dialogue between all stakeholders of the institution. It provides ownership to all of the institution's stakeholders, and further encourages collaboration in assessing the institution's strengths and weaknesses towards re-accreditation, which is required every three years.

Students have been included from the beginning of the UNIQUe development. The ESU (European Students Union) is represented on the UNIQUe Advisory Board.

4. Peer Review

The peer reviewers thoroughly work through the Self-Assessment Report. As a major step within the UNIQUe accreditation process and to build up on a properly completed SAR, students will also be interviewed to include their views on the quality evaluation process.

The Peer Review Visit (PRV) lasts 1.5 days during which the UNIQUe peer reviewers meet and interview a variety of people representing the university's different activities and interests (e.g. students, tutors, authors, administrative personnel, instructors/trainers).

As soon as the management can estimate the amount of time needed for the Self-Assessment phase, the institution should contact the UNIQUe Executive Office to schedule the PRV. The date of the Peer Review Visit should be determined at least 3 months in advance. In estimating the date for the PRV, the management should take into account that the SAR must reach the UNIQUe Office at least 6 weeks prior to the date of the PRV.

Six weeks before the PRV, the management needs also to send a proposed audit visit schedule in accordance with the PRV guidelines. This schedule will be reviewed by the UNIQUe Executive Office and changes proposed if needed.

The Peer Review Team will receive not only the SAR, but also its application, the report from the UNIQUe expert who performed the eligibility briefing, a copy of the letter sent to the institution declaring the programme eligible and the results of the student questionnaires. The tasks of the Peer Review Team and the characteristics and expectations of the PRV are described in detail in separate documents.

The Peer Review Team that carries out the on-site visit is composed of two members. One of the two peer reviewers will be appointed chairperson by the UNIQUe Executive Office. On receipt of the SAR, the chairperson may contact the other peer reviewer to prepare the PRV. In each case, the PRV begins with a private meeting of the Peer Review Team usually on the evening prior to the PRV. The aim of the meeting is to discuss the way in which they will organise their work during the Peer Review Visit and determine the issues on which emphasis should be placed.

At the end of the PRV, the chairperson presents to the management the Peer Review Team's preliminary conclusions and recommendations for quality improvement during an oral feedback session. Based on these conclusions and recommendations, the management and the peer reviewers will jointly discuss ways for improvement, including future steps that will be taken and measurable goals if applicable. The jointly agreed upon major steps for improvement will become part of the Peer Review Report (PRR) and hence will be a part of the Awarding Body decision.

Subsequent to the PRV, the chairperson writes the Peer Review Report (PRR) setting out the Peer Review Team's assessment of the university against the UNIQUe criteria and standards and including the steps agreed upon for the programme's future development. These recommendations and descriptions will be of three types:

- Agreed upon developments: These are steps for improvement that have been jointly agreed upon between the management and the peer reviewers at the end of the Peer Review Visit. The management is expected to follow these steps for improvement and report on progress within 1.5 years after successful accreditation.
- Recommendations by the Peer Review Team: These are suggestions which the Peer Review Team, based on the professional experience of its members, believes to be helpful for the management to achieve its strategic objectives. The programme management is not obliged to follow these recommendations.

Besides the verbal description of the assessed quality, the peer reviewers will also provide a detailed rating against the UNIQUe criteria (above-standard, to-standard, below-standard, not applicable) that sums up the Peer Review Team's assessment

Although the PRR has a very important impact on the accreditation decision to be taken by the Awarding Body, the Peer Review Team's positive recommendation does not automatically result in accreditation. The UNIQUe accreditation process incorporates a strict separation of powers between the Peer Review Team and the Awarding Body members to guarantee that the accreditation decision will be taken as objectively as possible.

5. Awarding Body

The UNIQUE Awarding Body makes the final decision on accreditation. The Awarding Body members will have a 2-week deadline to review the report and raise questions. If too many questions remain open and the Awarding Body members do not get a comprehensive and comprehensible view and report on the university, the chairperson - as a means of internal quality assurance - can decide to send the report back to the Peer Review Team for revision. The chairperson sets a reasonable timeframe during which the Peer Review Team will have to rework the Peer Review Report.

A conference call may be set up by the UNIQUE Executive Office between the members of the Awarding Body. It lies within the duties of the Awarding Body's chairperson to check and proactively reveal and detect any potential conflicts of interest with the Awarding Body members. After eliminating potential conflict of interest issues, the Awarding Body members will inform the chairperson of their vote. The voting is done by a simple majority of the Awarding Body members present. To successfully vote on an accreditation, at least three members of the Awarding Body must be in attendance.

The UNIQUE Office will inform the institutions of the results by telephone and will send an official confirmation letter to the management.

The results of the process can be:

- accredited
- not accredited
- candidate for accreditation (pending)

If an institution does not receive the accreditation (because some improvements are necessary) it will have 1 year time to reach the accreditation level required. In case it has not improved the required aspects or does not achieve the status of accredited (since the improvements to be introduced are too many and too fundamental), the university is required to wait at least 2 years before it can reapply for the UNIQUE label.

The universities may decide to announce that they are in the process to get the UNIQUE quality label (e.g. they have been considered eligible or they are candidate) but the UNIQUE Executive Office will only publish those universities which receive the full accreditation.

A successful UNIQUE accreditation is valid for three years. During this period, an institution may be published and marketed with the UNIQUE quality label.

The institution is required to submit a development report to the UNIQUE Executive Office after 18 months on how it is fulfilling the Peer Review Team's recommendations and the steps agreed upon for the improvements included in the Peer Review Report. The Report on Results (RoR) will be taken into consideration during the re-accreditation process. The RoR should be at least 2 pages in length and must address all the steps agreed upon for improvement in the Peer Review Report.

UNIQUE Governance Structure

Three bodies govern the UNIQUE process:

- *Supervisory Board*: which decides the eligibility of the candidate university
- *Advisory Board*: which does not have an executive role in any of decision making processes but provides advice for the continuous improvement process of UNIQUE label itself
- *Awarding Body*: an independent body which receives the report from the peer reviewers and makes decisions regarding the awarding of the UNIQUE accreditation label (e.g. if the university should be awarded the label or not).

In this way, there is a clear and effective separation of power between the body which governs eligibility and the one which awards the accreditation. The people who are members of the awarding body should be well known and recognised experts within the field.

UNIQUE Governance Structure



OVERVIEW OF THE AVAILABLE UNIQUe DOCUMENT

To ensure a high level of transparency and comprehensibility within the UNIQUe quality framework, UNIQUe makes available to the public a standard set of documents. These documents are described in the following.

UNIQUe LEAFLET	
PURPOSE	It provides very short overview of the UNIQUe project
TARGET	Anyone interested in the UNIQUe project
SOURCE	The most recent copy of this document is available on project website: http://unique.europace.org/

UNIQUe INFORMATION PACKAGE	
PURPOSE	It provides a short overview of the UNIQUe Accreditation process: methodology and the steps to be followed in order to complete successfully the accreditation process
TARGET	Anyone interested in the UNIQUe Quality label
SOURCE	The most recent copy of this document is available on project website: http://unique.europace.org/

UNIQUe WEBSITE	
PURPOSE	It is the place in which all the relevant documents are accessible. It also provides a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the UNIQUe Accreditation process.
TARGET	Anyone interested in the UNIQUe Quality label
SOURCE	http://unique.europace.org/

UNIQUe APPLICATION DATA FORM	
PURPOSE	The "UNIQUe Application Data Sheet" must be completed properly to begin the UNIQUe eligibility check. This information allows the verification of whether or not a University is eligible for UNIQUe accreditation. Hence, the UNIQUe Application Data Sheet serves as an official application form that must be

	signed by the Rector or the delegate of the Rector on ICT or eLearning
TARGET	Interested parties
SOURCE	The most recent copy of this document is available on the project website: http://unique.europace.org/
UNIQUEe SELF ASSESSMENT AND PEER REVIEW GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY	
PURPOSE	This guide supports the University to successfully complete the Self-Assessment process as well as the peer review visits. The Self-Assessment phase is an important step in the UNIQUEe accreditation process. It provides an assessment of the University's strengths and weaknesses relative to the UNIQUEe quality criteria and to its own mission and objectives. The Guide also includes a suggested schedule for the visit including the topics, expected attendees and what the candidate University should do as a host of a successful peer review visit
TARGET	Universities
SOURCE	The most recent copy of this document is available on the project website: http://unique.europace.org/

UNIQUEe GUIDE FOR PEER REVIEW TEAM (INTERNAL USE ONLY)	
PURPOSE	It provides the instruments, forms etc. for guiding the peer review process. The guide contains a specific chapter in which the format of the Self-Assessment report is detailed. This means that this Guide is the starting document which Peer Reviewers are required to carefully read.
TARGET	Peer review team
SOURCE	Since it is an internal document, the UNIQUEe executive office will send it only to the selected peer reviewers

UNIQUEe AWARDING BODY CODE OF PRACTICE (INTERNAL USE ONLY)	
PURPOSE	It provides the Awarding body with the necessary information on how to conduct the last phase of the accreditation process.
TARGET	Awarding body members
SOURCE	Since it is an internal document, the UNIQUEe executive office will send it only to the Awarding body members

UNIQUEe REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS (STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL)	
PURPOSE	The report presents the results of the accreditation process conducted within the University. This report will be sent by the UNIQUEe Executive Office (UEO) to the candidate Universities. This report contains the results of the decision taken by the Awarding body as well as key recommendations for further improvements. This report is strictly confidential.
TARGET	Candidate University
SOURCE	The reports are available on project website: http://unique.europace.org/

UNIQUEe SHORT PUBLIC REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS	
PURPOSE	The short report presents the results of the accreditation process conducted within the University. The content of the report will be agreed with each University participating in the UNIQUEe accreditation process. This report will be publically posted on the UNIQUEe website .
TARGET	Interested parties
SOURCE	The reports are available on project website: http://unique.europace.org/

