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Digital Internship Model for Higher Professional Studies

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QUALITY PLAN

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ABBREVIATIONS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

DIMPS	Digital internship model for higher professional studies
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
GA	Grant Agreement
NA	National Agency
PDCA	Plan-do-check-act
PHE	Professional Higher Education
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QAMC	Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee
TM	Transnational Meeting
UNIWA	University of West Attica
UR	University of Ruse Angel Kanchev
VI	Virtual Internship
VTSNS	Visoka tehnicka skola strukovnih studija u Novom Sadu Higher Education Technical School of Professional Studies in Novi Sad
WSAAS	Western Serbia Academy of Applied Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Quality Plan is to help assure the optimal quality of the entire project content, its structures, processes and results. It comprises a set of project activities belonging to quality assurance focused on the prevention of defects resulting from the processes used, and a set of quality control activities aiming to find and eliminate defects in deliverables made and procedures applied. It also deals with quality assessment activities concerning internal and external monitoring of results and reporting. This document will facilitate a critical overview of the project progress done by the Consortium and/or Project Steering Committee.

The Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee (QAMC) conducts continuous monitoring of the project, including the implementation and acceptance of the quality procedures. It is supported by all partners (in form of feedback, inputs about developments in their countries and institutions, different reports etc.) in order to steer the project into the right direction.

The QAMC is composed of representatives of all partners nominated at the Kick off meeting of the Consortium. The QAMC ensures timely, effective, efficient and sustainable management of project outcomes through the performance assessment. Objectively verifiable indicators are used to monitor the progress. The lead partner in charge of this segment of project activities dealing with quality is the VTSNS.

The VTSNS is responsible for preparing the draft of the Quality Plan which formalizes the approach to be followed by the partners of the project in order to ensure the highest possible quality of the project activities, outputs and outcomes and project management. The draft version is reviewed by the QAMC members. All project partners comment it and thus help in finalizing the document, which is approved by the Project Steering Committee and adopted by the Consortium.

- The Quality Plan defines procedures for:
 - Internal monitoring, quality and risk management;
 - External monitoring; and
 - Partners' technical and financial reporting.
- The Quality Plan also defines the quality expectations regarding the project deliverables:
 - Reports, documents;
 - Events, workshops and meetings; and
 - Procedures for internal and external monitoring.

The Quality Plan is the basis, according to which activities, processes and deliverables are continually evaluated and assessed in order to achieve the highest quality of processes and outputs. All tools, methods and strategies for quality control, assurance and quality management, such as peer reviewing, PDCA method, assessment of end-users' satisfaction and project results, are applied in line with best practices.

2. OBJECTIVES AND TASKS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING

This Chapter defines the objectives and tasks of the quality assurance and monitoring, and expectations of the Consortium regarding the project as a whole, its deliverables, i.e. the documents, written materials, ICT platforms, workshops, organization of meetings and other activities, as well as the project management.

Quality control includes the content of the project, development and implementation of methodology, keeping to the time plan, dissemination, horizontal and vertical coordination, and efficiency of the whole process. The main tasks of the QAMC are to:

- Develop Quality Assurance mechanisms and agree on the procedures;
- Create the agreed Quality Assurance procedures; and
- Create questionnaire templates for reviewing different types of activities, distribute them and analyse findings.

2.1 QUALITY OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The main objective of this project is to introduce a specific virtual internship (VI) model and methodology for VIs with practical workflows and guidelines, which enable quality design of customized and flexible internship programmes in professional higher education (PHE).

In order to deliver an efficient, personalized and low-cost solution for VIs, the partnership have agreed to design and develop specialized web software to connect all parties (students, PHE institutions, and companies) within a secure and collaborative web platform.

The overall broader objective to which DIMPS project will contribute is to facilitate the internship in professional studies and increase its inclusivity, improving in this way the quality of the PHE process in general. Additionally, the specific objectives of the project are:

- To develop a model for digital internship in PHE, including learning outcomes and methodology for its implementation;
- To create an online platform for the organization and management of such VIs;
- To create a toolkit/guide for the implementation of VI with two parts: one for companies, including the creation of a complete or partial digital internship position, task selection and delegation, monitoring of progress and program accomplishment; and the other for PHE institutions including student support, monitoring and validation of student progress, assessment of learning outcomes, and support to internship mentors in companies;
- To raise capacities of PHE teachers/trainers/mentors for organizing VIs;
- To improve professional and digital skills of students;
- To improve capacities of enterprises to carry out digital internships;
- To create a network of PHE institutions and business partners involved in conducting VIs;

The partners agree that the objectives mentioned herein will always be in the forefront of all decisions to be taken.

Quality control activities conducted by the QAMC and its quarterly reporting facilitate a critical overview of the project progress after every 3 months, done by the Consortium and/or PSC. This overview may suggest possible changes to the originally planned timescale, in order to plan efficient implementation of activities in the following period. The aim is to fulfill the project objectives in the best possible way.

The QAMC members do the following:

- Produce appropriate reports on the quality reviewing process regarding the completed activities;
- Publish and post the written quality reports on the project website in order to ensure visibility and dissemination towards all DIMPS bodies and all involved staff of the partners;
- Meet in full attendance three times during the project at TMs;
- Conduct partial control during any visit to partners;
- Between these full or reduced meetings, communicate online in compliance with the Activity Plan;
- Consolidate reports of the partners, QAMC reports and produce summary reports to be sent to the Coordinator.

2.2 QUALITY OF PROJECT DELIVERABLES

The deliverables of the project encompass printed and/or electronically available documents such as reports, publications, manuals, methodology, plans, instructions, guides, promotional material, then the ICT platforms developed and launched, as well as organized events (workshops, info days, etc.).

A common quality expectation for all deliverables is their relevance to the project objectives and to priorities and topics selected in the application phase, with a further focus on their development in an efficient and effective manner, keeping up with the time agenda.

2.2.1 Quality of document-based deliverables

A consistent and common format for all document-based deliverables (Word documents, PowerPoint presentations) is to be followed by all partners by using templates provided within this Quality Plan:

- Annex A – Checklist for review of deliverable
- Annex B – Word document template (reports, publications, agendas)
- Annex C – PowerPoint presentation template
- Annex D – Attendance sheet template
- Annex E – Participant's feedback form
- Annex F – Event report template

The templates ensure a common appearance of deliverables with a minimum amount of information on the project displayed consistently in all documents produced. This is not relevant to deliverables that by their nature need to have a different format such as project brochures, newsletters and alike.

When partners produce studies and publications as deliverable, they are obliged to put Erasmus+ logo consisting of the sentence “*Funded by Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union*” on the cover or the first page. Moreover, they must use the following disclaimer on the inner pages: “*The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*”

2.2.2 Quality of project events

All events within the project should be organized professionally. The organizers provide in due time a full information package to the participants including the draft agenda, letters of invitation and a note on the logistics (informing about travel arrangements, venue, suggested hotels, etc.). Time for preparation activities depends on the type of event and is defined in separate action plans by IO coordinator.

The meeting organizers ensure smooth registration processes (including the list of attendees – Annex D), suitable meeting locations and proper time for event sessions and breaks, as well as necessary materials (e.g., handouts, promotional material). The organizers are responsible for the recording of minutes of the meetings in a concise style including a list of action points.

Where appropriate (e.g., for workshops), feedback forms are distributed among participants (Annex E), and event reports related to feedback forms are prepared by organizers (Annex F). PowerPoint presentations should be made using the developed template (Annex C). Each event is documented with various materials as described in Table 1.

The competency of the attendees at info-days and workshops and of their home organization will be evaluated by the host institution. At the base level, the majority of project activities and events is evaluated by suitable questionnaires in order to hear the involved parties.

The Coordinator and the QAMC members will conduct partial control during any visit/event.

Templates of all project documents including questionnaires for surveys are made by VTSNS being in charge of the Quality Plan preparation. Their final form is to be approved as described in 3.1.

A partner leading an activity or organizing an event is in charge of document and result aggregation for further display and/or for the Final Report. The results obtained, depending on their character, are promoted during dissemination events within the project and beyond.

Table 1 – Documentation of Project Events

Type of event	Documents	Available at	
		Project website	Task Tracker Platform
Info-days and workshops	Agenda	+	+
	List of participants*	+	+
	Report	+	+
	Photo gallery	+	+
	Presentations**	+	+
TM meetings	Agenda	+	+
	List of participants*	+	+
	Minutes		+
	Photo gallery	+	+
	Presentations		+
PSC meetings	Agenda		+
	List of participants*		+
	Report		+
QAMC meetings	Agenda		+
	List of participants*		+
	Report	+	+

* Name and affiliation will be visible; all personal data will be hidden (e-mail addresses, etc.)

** Upon the approval of the presenter

2.2.3 Quality of promotional materials

The most common printed items for project promotion are the flyer, brochure, poster, roll up, folder and notebook/notepad, all designed for dissemination purposes during project events (meetings, workshops, info-days).

Small brochures and three-page fliers (at least one of each per country in English and local languages, in circulation sufficient to satisfy the needs of planned events), are made and distributed at appropriate events to students, company representatives, journalists and decision makers in the field of HE to promote digital internship via the newly developed methodology and ICT VI platform with the help of the toolkit/Guide for VI.

The design of all promotional material reflects the visual identity of the project and the Erasmus+ Programme. Besides the Erasmus+ logo with the funding message, brochures and fliers also display the EC disclaimer mentioned earlier in 2.2.1 Quality of document-based deliverables.

The draft version is sent to all partners for comments, suggestions and final approval, before printing, publishing and distribution. The materials are disseminated by all project partners at relevant events.

The partner in charge of developing the Dissemination Plan is UNIWA, and its PMU will in cooperation with the Coordinator orchestrate all dissemination activities and promotional material production.

2.2.4 Quality of website and other electronic tools

The project website is available to general public and stakeholders for the period of six years from the beginning of the project in March 2021. Its purpose is spreading the word about the project, hence it contains all relevant information regarding the project, its objectives, project partners, expected results, news and upcoming events in English and the languages of the partners.

The main parts of the project website are:

- HOME
- ABOUT PROJECT (Project description, Objectives, Project management, Project visual identity)
- PARTNERS
- PROJECT RESULTS
- EVENTS
- GALLERY
- CONTACT

The Coordinator is responsible for setting up, maintaining and regular updating of the project website with information and materials received from project partners, including news on dissemination activities. The website will be linked to institutional websites of all partners and other interested stakeholders, and to social networks.

The partners should promote the project on their websites and other electronic tools (such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn profiles/groups, newsletters, etc.) by providing a short description of the project, its logo and a link to the project website.

The project will be presented to specific and wider public through four e-bulletins in English and three national languages, following the visual identity of the project and comprising selected data relevant to the targeted audiences (companies, students, PHE institutions, media, etc.).

The online task tracker platform is the single point of reference for the project documentation and communication among partners, established to keep records on the compliance of each partner with the Activity Plan. It will be set up and maintain by the WSAAS, and accessed by all partners depending on the tasks and roles assigned. The task tracker platform should be user-friendly and secure.

Four web-based platforms for virtual internship that are to be established in partner organisations should have the software solution with architecture based on open standards, to be connected or integrated in both directions with other specialized e-learning platforms that complement VI user experience. The VI LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) platforms should offer several advantages:

- Modest hardware/software requirements;
- Easy management (maintenance, update, backup, optimization);
- Accessibility (can be run on a wider range of devices);
- Security (users only access some segments of the data);

- Cost efficiency based on cloud services or a centralized web server;
- Scalability of the resources as needed.

The WSAAS will coordinate the group activities regarding VI platforms and be responsible for output compliance with the adopted timeline.

2.3 QUALITY OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

All project partners actively participate in all activities, but their role and workload in specific segments of the project differ. The expertise and capacity of every partner is matched with their contribution to the project outcomes, including the distribution of management tasks. For each activity, a leading participant is dedicated, with the role to coordinate the activities performed by other involved members.

The overall project coordination is the responsibility of the applicant organization, WSAAS, with the active involvement of all partners via the project Consortium. Quality issues are delegated to the VTSNS. risk management to UR, and dissemination is led by UNIWA. All activities are carried out in accordance with relevant key project documents: Project Management Plan, detailed Activity Plan, Risk Plan, Quality Plan, and Dissemination Plan.

2.3.1 Management layers

The Consortium, made of representatives of all partners, provides strategic project management and monitors the overall progress. On the Kick-off meeting, it adopts the document on management procedures, with an emphasis on modifications of task distribution and conflict resolution, as well as other basic project documents stated in the previous section.

The PSC and QAMC are composed of all partners and act as sub-bodies of the Consortium. Members meet in person at TMs, or online in compliance with the Activity Plan.

The PSC has an overall responsibility for mapping milestone activity progress and data management. It is responsible to ensure successful implementation and funding.

The QAMC is in charge of monitoring all indicators of progress, as well as indicators of quality achievement (outputs) and involved staff. 'State-of-project' reports, prepared by the QAMC, are presented to all partners on a quarterly basis. The project progress is evaluated based on reports on reached milestones/deliverables in agreement with the Activity Plan.

The project management and implementation structure rely on the PMU at WSAAS, as the applicant organization, which includes management, legal, administrative, financial and technical staff. The PMU provides continuous project management and prepares the Project Management Plan and Activity Plan.

Other partners form their PMUs to cover the following activities: preparing transnational meetings, writing reports, monitoring the progress of activities, risk plan development, quality plan development, monitoring the quality of the project, and dissemination.

Project management activities are planned by the PMUs, PSC, and QAMC, and they perform operative decision-making on issues in their domains and at specific management layers.

2.4 AMENDMENTS TO THE QUALITY PLAN

The process of altering or amending the Quality Plan is initiated due to detected problems during the self-evaluation and the evaluation of the achieved project results. The correction procedure is justified by the QAMC. The final decision on the Quality Plan amendment is made by the PSC. The amended new version is communicated to all partners and takes effect 15 calendar days after the communication.

3. INTERNAL MONITORING

Internal monitoring serves as an effective method for quality definition. It will be carried out by all partners and comprises a broad and thorough evaluation including:

- Activity Plan evaluation;
- Budget and cash flow tables evaluation;
- Monitoring visits of the QAMC during TM meetings;
- Questionnaires for survey of target groups (e.g., participants in the dissemination events);
- PSC meetings.

3.1 LEVELS OF INTERNAL QUALITY CONTROL MONITORING

The internal monitoring control mechanism is based on four levels of control, as explained below. Additionally, internal quality control is also required by the partners, i.e., contact persons will always check outputs of their organization before sending documents for review or before uploading them on the project website or online task tracker platform.

- First level control – Deliverable authors, IO coordinators, PMU leader

The IO coordinators of an executive team and associated partners involved in the activity along with the corresponding PMU leader have a joint responsibility to produce the deliverable and guarantee its quality and timeliness. The deliverable should be made in accordance with the Activity Plan (modified and agreed by the PSC on a quarterly basis). Their task is to present a “final draft deliverable” to the QAMC.

- Second level control – Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee

The QAMC members act as deliverable reviewers. The QAMC members who are authors of deliverables are exempt from controlling their own deliverables at this level since they have already done it at the previous level. There should be at least two QAMC reviewers, who are not authors of the deliverable being controlled. Within 10 working days, the QAMC reviewing team should prepare a report with comments in accordance with the template for the quality assurance check list (Annex A). The deliverable authors have 10 more working days to conform to the reviewer’ comments and prepare a corrected draft deliverable, or to send their written objections, in which case the reviewers have another 10 days to send back their final comments.

- Third level control – Coordinator

This level of control is carried out by the Coordinator in two situations:

a) The third level control of deliverables is activated in case of profound disagreement between reviewers and IO coordinator at the second level control, whereat a draft deliverable could not ensure the QAMC team justification. The Coordinator intensifies the solution search involving the Consortium in overcoming the issue. The Coordinator has the final word and all rights in the process of resolving the disagreement.

b) A draft deliverable that has successfully passed the second level of control should also be subjected to the check by the Coordinator. This results in final comments. After the acceptance, it is forwarded to the PSC for formal approval, if required.

- Forth level control – Project Steering Committee (final approval)

The PSC as the highest level of control has a role of a decision-maker and is a body responsible for approving deliverables. In case when the deliverable has passed the second and third levels of control without profound disagreements, which results in absence of required major modifications and alterations of the deliverable, then it can be included in the project reports regardless of the pending status of the formal approval.

3.2 QUALITY RESPONSIBILITIES

Several different roles, all having different responsibilities, are identified with regard to project activities and in particular its quality assurance procedures.

3.2.1 Intellectual Output coordinator

- Organizes and coordinates tasks related to the development of the deliverable(s);
- Assigns parts of the work to other partners involved in the activity, coordinates their work, providing guidance when necessary and aligning their contributions in the deliverable;
- Submits the deliverable in accordance with the required template to the PMU leader of their organization (1st level control);
- Reports to the PMU leader about any problems occurring during the implementation of the activity;
- Is responsible for submission of the draft deliverable to the QAMC (2nd level control) and the Coordinator (3rd level control);
- Implements the suggestions of the QAMC, and assigns certain amendments as appropriate;
- Is responsible for timely sending the amended draft deliverable.

3.2.2 Other partners involved in the activity, co-authors

- Follow instructions of the IO coordinator on the fulfillment of their part of the assignment related to the deliverable;
- Make sure that their written contributions comply with the appropriate template;
- Provide the IO coordinator with all the complementary information regarding their work (i.e., references, bibliography, methodologies used, contact details of people interviewed etc.);
- Implement amendments to their contribution as a result of the amendments requested by the QAMC, after consulting the IO coordinator.

3.2.3 Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee (QAMC)

- Is coordinated by the QAMC Coordinator, as agreed by the PSC at the Kick-off meeting;
- Is responsible for the quality assurance of deliverables;
- Receives each draft deliverable from the IO coordinator and provides feedback using the Checklist for review of deliverables (Annex A);
- Sends the filled-in Checklist for review of deliverables to the IO coordinator and the Coordinator;
- Verifies the satisfactory implementation of the recommendations included in the Checklist for review of deliverables, in co-operation with the IO coordinator;
- Cooperates with the Coordinator on general issues related to the quality level of the project deliverables.

3.2.4 Coordinator

- Cooperates with the QAMC and IO coordinator on all matters ensuring the quality of the project deliverables;
- Ensures effective resolving of all disputable matters arisen in the process of quality control;
- Provides final comments on deliverables to the IO coordinator (3rd level control);
- Cooperates with the IO coordinator and ensures conformity of all tasks;
- Informs the QAMC and the IO coordinator about any changes in the Partnership Agreement and the related Activity Plan or any implicit changes in the implementation of the project that may affect the timing or the content of the relevant deliverables;
- Officially submits all approved deliverables after their approval at the 4th level control.

3.2.5 Project Steering Committee (PSC)

The PSC officially approves and finally accepts the deliverables under full responsibility. The decisions are made jointly.

3.3 QUALITY FEEDBACK BY THE TARGET GROUPS

The impact assessment of the project activities and satisfaction with the project achievements by the project target groups will be investigated and controlled by numerous visits, interviews, questionnaires and consultation with the stakeholders, beneficiaries and final users. It will be performed by statistical evaluation of the acquired variety of information.

Therefore, two templates have been made:

- The participant feedback template for evaluating different events (Annex E) that may be adapted to specific needs, but the main template items should be kept

unchanged; and

- The event report template (Annex F) to be filled by project partners, i.e., organizers of events (workshops, info days, meetings etc. – except PSC meetings), with the summary of statistical data on feedback collected by participants about their satisfaction.

3.4 PROJECT RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management, as part of the internal quality management, is the process of identifying, assessing and controlling threats to the successful realization of all project aspects. Generally, there are four major areas where risks may stem from:

- Project finances (delayed payment, late invoice submission and expenditure validation, inadequate spending);
- Project timeline (postponing of activities/deliverables);
- Performance (delayed, rushed or poor implementation resulting in low quality);
- Sustainability of project results.

All details concerning possible risks related to the DIMPS project are presented in the Risk Plan developed by the UR. The identification and assessment of the manifested risks is a joint responsibility of all project partners and it is reported to the UR, as a partner in charge of risk handling, to the Coordinator, and the PSC. The main assessment is carried out and reviewed during the PSC meetings. The developed risk management strategies at the meetings should alleviate the risk by undertaking some corrective actions and adaptations of the Action Plan based on a sound risk brainstorming process. In particular, partners should consider preventive actions (avoiding risk occurrence) and corrective actions (decreasing risk severity and impact), specifying also the resources that might be needed.

The PSC may react in several ways, ranging from the simple acceptance of the situation in the case of negligible risks to the enforcement of a mitigation plan including alternatives, workarounds and proposed corrective actions to make risk consequences acceptable for the Consortium.

Also, NA representatives as external reviewers are involved in the risk management. During their monitoring visits, they should assess the risk of project failure to meet its objectives, and the risk referring to the utilization of the allocated funds in accordance with the planned project budget.

In order to avoid or diminish the occurrence of risk, all project partners have to ensure correct allocation of the needed human and financial resources.

3.4.1 Practical approach to risk identification

The first step in project risk management is to identify, as early as possible, risks that are possible or already present in the project in order to undertake the most effective actions for correction and/or prevention of consequences. A risk monitoring sheet has been developed for the purpose of identifying and monitoring risks within the DIMPS project including the information on corrective and/or preventive actions (Annex G).

3.4.2 Risks/Uncertainty monitoring procedure

- IO coordinator identify possible risks/uncertainties in their domain and fill in the risk monitoring sheet template (Annex G).

The risk monitoring sheet (Annex G) is communicated to the QAMC, PSC and Coordinator;

- The QAMC, PSC and Coordinator register, analyze and prioritize risks/uncertainties;
- The QAMC, PSC and Coordinator plan and implement risk responses.

The risk brainstorming sessions are organized within the PST meetings. Their conclusions should be in conformity with the prepared risk monitoring sheet template. After each PST meeting, the template is updated by the QAMC.

4. EXTERNAL MONITORING

The external monitoring of the project includes assessment of various project aspects such as relevance (in terms of its objectives and achievements in the course of time), efficiency (timely execution of activities), effectiveness (how well the project specific objectives are met), impact (at the level of departments, faculty, university, etc.) and sustainability (what remains after the project).

The external monitoring comprises three types of monitoring, based on the deliverable achievement:

- Preventive;
- Advisory; and
- Control (after the end of the project – sustainability check).

Since the DIMPS is a decentralized project, the external monitoring will be performed by the Erasmus+ NA in Serbia, Foundation Tempus, located in Belgrade.

5. PARTNERS' TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTING

All partners in the Erasmus+ programme should abide by Contractual and Financial Rules of the Grant Agreement. Accordingly, during the DIMPS project, two semiannual financial reports of the partners and one technical report are required.

Twice during the project lifetime, the PSC and the Coordinator should make a check of the hard copies of the financial reporting documents. The required review should be made on the basis of the following assessment criteria:

- Conformity of expenditures with the allocated project budget;
- Eligibility of expenditures;
- Correctness and completeness of all supporting documentation and certified invoice copies;
- Correctness of calculations and applied exchange rates;
- Eligibility and justification of any changes occurring between the budget categories;
- Financial reports must be signed in original by the appointed PMU leader of the partner institution.

In case the semiannual report of a partner is not complete or justified, the PSC should make recommendations for the solution of the occurred financial problem and rectification of the Report. After the approval of the Semiannual Report by the Coordinator, it is transferred to the partner institution.

ANNEXES

- Annex A – Checklist for review of deliverable
- Annex B – Word document template (reports, publications, agendas)
- Annex C – PowerPoint presentation template
- Annex D – Attendance sheet template
- Annex E – Participant's feedback form
- Annex F – Event report template