eAMK Quality Criteria for Online Implementations

Mari Varonen
JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland
mari.varonen@jamk.fi

Paula Tyrväinen
JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland
paula.tyrvainen@jamk.fi

Abstract

23 Finnish universities of applied sciences will open a shared digital courses offering in September 2018. The year-round digital courses offering will work under the name CampusOnline.fi. It will offer the students cross-studying opportunities between the educational institutions, as well as a new way of matching work and studying to shorten studying times, make study paths more versatile and, ultimately, secure better employment.

Behind the changes that are visible to the students, digital pedagogy and teachers' competences are being developed via nation-wide coaching programme. The program started early 2018 to ensure that the staff competence on digital pedagogy is up to date with the renewing operating culture and that the quality of the courses offered through CampusOnline.fi is consistent and as high as possible.

The coaching programme is based on a quality criteria for online implementations, which consists of 11 topics:

1. Target group and users
2. Learning objectives, learning process and pedagogical solutions
3. Assignments
4. Contents and materials
5. Tools
6. Interaction
7. Guidance and feedback
8. Evaluation
9. Development
10. Usability and visuals
11. Support services

The quality criteria is available online in several languages and it is free of charge. It can be used for organisation-wide development work as well as for self-assessment by teachers. In addition to the coaching programme, several Finnish universities of applied sciences have utilized the quality criteria in their internal quality development.

The workshop engages participants to try out and experiment practical ways to use the quality criteria.

Keywords: online courses offering, quality criteria

1. Shared digital courses offering by Finnish universities of applied sciences

eAMK – The new ecosystem of learning is a higher education development project funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and carried out from 2017 to 2019. 23 Finnish universities of applied sciences are involved, and the purpose of the project is to create and open a shared digital courses offering by all Finnish universities of applied sciences all year round, providing students with extensive cross-studying opportunities. At the same time, the project involves developing digital pedagogy, teacher competence and working life co-operation towards a learning ecosystem where both working life practices and students develop through network-like and dynamic co-operation.

The shared courses offering will be compiled onto the CampusOnline.fi website, on which students can browse the selection and choose suitable courses provided by other universities of applied sciences. Students can take courses free of charge. The CampusOnline portal is based on the shared UAS summer study portal SummerSemester.fi, which has been in operation for a few years and has facilitated online learning during the summer. Last summer, the portal had more than 500 courses available. After the summer of 2018, SummerSemester.fi will merge with the CampusOnline.fi portal. At the same time, the courses will become available all year round. SummerSemester.fi has been a popular way to spend the summer among students who have not found a job or a practical training place for the summer. Feedback from SummerSemester.fi students has been positive, and the students have expressed a desire to have the courses offering available all year round.

CampusOnline provides students of universities of applied sciences with more flexible and versatile study paths, as well as specialisation opportunities – the students have more courses to choose from and can study topics that they find interesting. CampusOnline also supports the coordination of the students' studies and work, as it provides more online learning opportunities than before. The extensive online study opportunities can help students speed up their graduation and thus contribute to a swift transition to working life. From a working life perspective, the new digital education solutions guarantee that students have tools for developing their own digital capabilities for working life.

When the CampusOnline portal opens in the autumn of 2018, it will have around 60 pilot courses from more than 20 universities of applied sciences available. The courses offering will include courses from all fields, Bachelor's and Master's level studies, English-language implementations and joint implementations by several universities of applied sciences. The teachers of these pilot courses have taken part in the *Laadukas verkkototeutus* ("Quality Online Implementation") coaching programme. The coaching programme involved developing the teachers' digital pedagogy skills. The programme was based on jointly created e-teaching quality criteria, and the central theme of the coaching was guidance regarding the use of the quality criteria and support for the creation or updating of each teacher's own course in accordance with the quality criteria together with e-learning experts. This article presents the shared quality criteria.

2. Quality criteria supporting the development of online implementations

The quality of the courses provided through eAMK is ensured with a set of shared quality criteria. The criteria are utilised in evaluating existing online implementations, as well as design and development work for new

online courses. The *Laadukas verkkototeutus* coaching programme of the eAMK project is built on the themes of the quality criteria, and the criteria are heavily involved in the training courses of the coaching programme. The quality criteria have also been put into extensive use outside the eAMK project, by institutions of higher education and other educational institutions. The criteria have been utilised diversely, especially as self-evaluation tools for online implementations.

Experts from institutions of higher education involved in the eAMK project took part in compiling the quality criteria. The goal was to achieve quality criteria that are as comprehensive, concrete and suitable for UAS courses as possible. Special emphasis was placed on internationalisation, working life co-operation and the perspective of Master's degree studies. Existing Finnish and European criteria for measuring the quality of online studies were utilised in the compilation process, most importantly the quality cards of the *Uutta avointa energiaa* ("New Open Energy") project and the JAMK quality criteria for online pedagogy. The criteria were exposed to open commenting online on two occasions and developed based on the criticisms received. The eAMK quality criteria were completed in December 2017. The criteria have been translated into three languages and can be utilised freely online: https://www.eamk.fi/en/courses-offering/quality-criteria/

The quality criteria consist of 11 themes, each containing 2–11 criteria. Every criterion is presented from two perspectives: 1) how it comes up in the design and production phase and 2) how it comes up during the implementation. This makes it possible to evaluate the quality of the online implementation both in the preparatory phase and when the implementation is underway.

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The learning objectives are defined in a competence-based, working life oriented and RDI-based manner with future orientation taken into consideration. Field-specific and generic competences can be found in the course description.

The course has been designed and is implemented as an international collaboration, if possible.

The work methods of the implementation are selected to support the acquisition of generic skills.

The implementation provides various methods and ways to support the participants' own objectives.

Learning objectives, learning process and pedagogical solutions

The learning objectives are defined in a competence-based and working life oriented manner with the development of generic skills taken into consideration. The course involves applying suitable pedagogical models and modes of operation, as well as methods that are in line with the concept of learning of the course.

The contents and methods of the course, as well as the technical and pedagogical solutions, support the participants in reaching their learning objectives.

The students' internationalisation is reinforced with the course.

The work methods of the implementation support the development and achievement of generic skills.

The students are able to set their own objectives in relation to the objectives of the course.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The purpose, the objective, the procedure, the evaluation criteria and the schedule of the assignments are clearly described on the online platform.

The assignments are designed to promote the achievement of the learning objectives and to correspond with or anticipate actual working life situations.

The assignments guide the students towards achieving the learning objectives of the course.

The design of the assignments takes the possibilities of information and communication technology into consideration, including opportunities for communal working and information building.

The assignments are designed so that the students have an opportunity to choose technological solutions that suit their needs, such as audio, video, images and various texts.

Assignments

The learning assignments promote the achievement of learning objectives, are working life oriented and make it possible to take the students' individuality into account. The work methods chosen for the implementation support communal information building and competence sharing.

The purpose, the objective, the procedure, the evaluation criteria and the schedule of the assignments can be found on the online platform.

The assignments are connected to the learning objectives and actual working life situations.

The assignments are understandable and guide the students' work.

The assignments are suitable for online learning and can be completed online individually or in collaboration with other students.

When carrying out assignments, the students have access to various technological solutions, such as audio, video, images and various texts.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The contents are designed and the pedagogical solutions selected so that the students are able to combine new information with previously learned information and apply it.

The students are guided on the online platform in terms of selecting study materials.

The materials are ensured to be up to date and reliable. Any outdated materials have been updated.

The online implementation utilises materials to which the institution has an access right. References and copyright information have been marked appropriately.

An agreement has been made regarding the storage and utilisation practices related to materials produced by the students during the course.

Contents and materials

The contents and materials support the achievement of learning objectives.

The contents help the learners combine new information with previously learned information. The contents support the application of information.

The students receive guidance for selecting study materials that support their learning objectives.

The teachers and the students produce and select materials that are up to date and compiled from reliable sources.

References and access right information are included in the materials.

Information about practices related to the storage and utilisation of materials produced by the students can be found on the online platform.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The implementation utilises online tools that support the achievement of learning objectives, the pedagogical approach used and the work processes of the professional field in question.

Downloading applications (e.g. e-books, software designed for different fields) or creating new user accounts must be based on learning objectives. Any downloaded applications must be free-of-charge and secure.

Instructions for using the online platform and any applications and tools used, as well as creating a user account, are easy to understand and located on or linked to the online platform.

The online platform utilises tools that enable the collection of metadata and learning analytics.

The course description lists the basic equipment required for completing the course, as well as other necessary applications.

The implementation is designed so that completing the course does not require an online connection that is faster than conventional connections for homes or housing companies.

Tools

The online tools support learning and learning objectives.

The implementation involves using online tools that support the achievement of learning objectives, are pedagogically justified and are suitable for professional work processes.

If the achievement of learning objectives requires downloading applications or creating a new user account, the matter is explained on the online platform. Any downloaded applications are free-of-charge and secure.

Instructions for using the online platform and tools, downloading applications and creating a user account can be found on the online platform.

The teacher and the students receive metadata from the online platform. The teacher may utilise said data for e.g. guidance, and the students may utilise the data for purposes such as monitoring the progress of their studies.

Information about the basic equipment required for completing the course, as well as any other necessary applications, can be found in the course description.

The course can be completed with a conventional online connection speed.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The implementation utilises modes of interaction and tools that support the achievement of learning objectives in an optimal manner.

Appropriate tools have been selected for collaborations with stakeholders, such as labour market representatives, and the use of said tools has been confirmed.

Interaction

Interaction supports the achievement of learning objectives.

The teacher and the students have an opportunity for mutual interaction, communal working, learning from others and sharing experiences online.

Stakeholders, such as labour market representatives, are able to easily take part in collaborations during the implementation.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The arrangement and implementation methods of student guidance are described on the online platform.

The implementation is designed in a manner that enables the teacher, other students and stakeholders to provide guidance and feedback during the course.

The online platform provides the students with an opportunity to participate in guiding discussions using a variety of tools.

The analysis tools of the online platform are available for supporting the students' progress and guidance.

The responsible persons, channels and schedules related to student guidance are described on the online platform.

The online platform has a channel for the students' feedback and questions.

Guidance and feedback

Guidance and feedback are timely and available for the duration of the course.

Information about student guidance and its implementation methods can be found on the online platform.

The students have an opportunity to receive guidance and feedback from teachers, other students and stakeholder representatives during the course.

The students are able to actively take part in guiding discussions utilising a variety of tools.

The analysis tools of the online platform are utilised for monitoring the students' progress, encouraging them to make progress and supporting their guidance.

The responsible persons, channels and schedules related to student guidance can easily be found on the online platform.

The students are able to give feedback and ask questions for the duration of the entire course.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The evaluation criteria are based on the learning objectives of the course. The criteria and evaluation methods are detailed in the course description.

The evaluation can be carried out continuously with versatile evaluation methods and tools, such as self-evaluations, peer reviews and various automatic tests.

Evaluation

The evaluation is transparent, continuous and versatile with a focus on developing reflection skills.

The implementation method, the subjects and the areas of the evaluation can be found in the course description. The evaluation is carried out in accordance with the evaluation criteria.

Evaluation takes place throughout the learning process, and it is carried out by utilising versatile methods. The students participate in self-evaluations and peer reviews using the tools of the online platform.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

Updating and keeping the course up to date has been taken care of; the revision of aspects such as learning objectives, contents, methods, evaluation and online tools is taken into consideration in the development work.

Feedback collection from the course teachers and the students is planned and scheduled. Collected feedback has been reacted to and the implementation is developed and updated based on the feedback.

Development

The online implementation is developed constantly.

The course is up to date and updated in terms of aspects such as learning objectives, contents, methods, evaluation and online tools.

Feedback is collected from the teachers and the students at least after the implementation. The course is developed based on the feedback received.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

The implementation has a clear structure and progress is fluent. The online platform features instructions for the different stages of progress.

Contents (e.g. folders, pages, files) are named understandably and their functionality has been ensured.

Headers, contents and tables have a unified style.

Readability is prioritised in font selections. Font variation is minimised. The default font size is large enough and can be enlarged.

Text files are in a format that can be read with a screen reader.

Visual elements and effects are used sparingly to support the contents.

Usability and visuals ½

The implementation is clear, usable and secure.

The structure of the course and the different stages of progress are presented clearly. Matters that are essential to completing the course and correspond with the course description are compiled and can be found on the online platform.

Contents (e.g. folders, pages, files) are recognisable and functional.

The overall contents are presented in a unified style.

The fonts used are easy to read. The texts are large enough or can be enlarged.

The texts can be read with a screen reader.

The visual elements support the contents.

Realisation during implementation

Realisation in the planning and production phase

Videos and sound files feature subtitles, or their contents are otherwise available in text.

Link description texts are formulated to be informative. Links are set to open to a new browser window.

Materials that are not barrier-free are marked clearly.

The applications selected for the online implementation work and the materials are accessible through all types of terminal devices.

The online platform and its contents, as well as any other applications used on the course, meet all relevant information security requirements.

Usability and visuals 2/2

The implementation is clear, usable and secure.

Videos and sound files are subtitled, or their contents are otherwise available in text.

Link description texts are understandable. Links open to a new browser window.

Materials that are not barrier-free are clearly distinguished.

The studies can be carried out regardless of the type of terminal equipment.

Studying on the online platform and using various applications and tools is secure. The contents and materials are secure.

Realisation during implementation

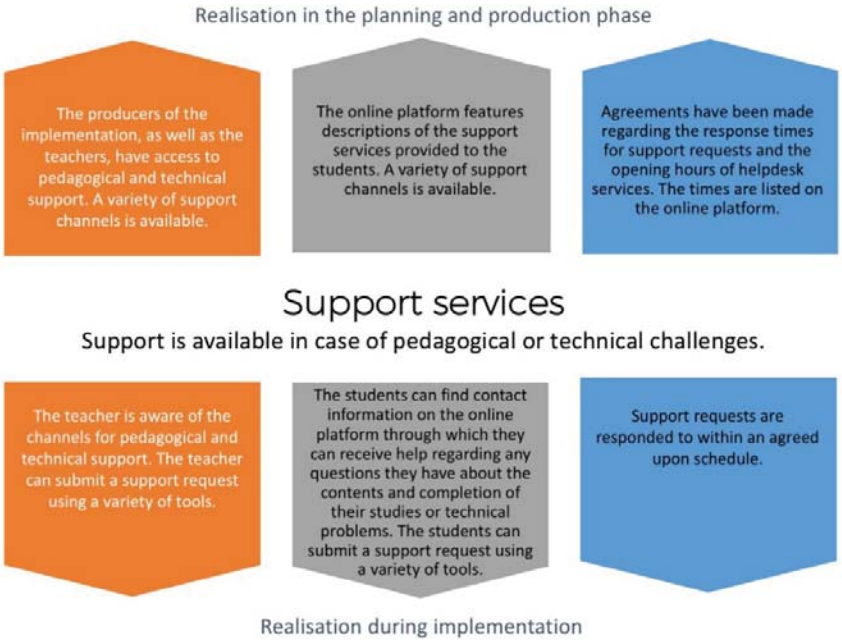

Figure 1: Quality Criteria for Online Implementations

3. Conclusions

CampusOnline expands constantly, and after the pilot phase in the autumn of 2018, universities of applied sciences will be free to bring courses to the portal. However, the aim is to maintain a high level of quality for the courses, and universities of applied sciences are required to use the quality criteria in evaluating any courses to be added to the shared courses offering. Because the courses offering is expected to expand rapidly, the courses will not be checked or evaluated by any organisation or operator. Instead, the institution of higher education or consortium implementing the course will be responsible for its quality.

After completing the quality criteria, we determined that there is a need for them beyond the eAMK project. In addition to the UAS sector, the criteria have been put into use extensively by other educational organisations, and the feedback regarding them has been enthusiastic and positive. The quality criteria are an essential part of the development work for the shared courses offering of the eAMK project. As the project progresses, the criteria will be reviewed and, if necessary, developed further based on the feedback received.

In the future, the shared courses offering will be developed with aspects such as internationalisation and working life co-operation taken into consideration. In other words, the aim is to complement the offering with studies that are produced in co-operation with international partners and the working life sector. The development will also take needs related to lifelong learning into consideration, and the aim is to open the offering for those in working life as well in the future. What is important is that all Finnish universities of applied sciences have endeavoured in close collaboration to provide their students with opportunities to select studies

from other institutions of higher education as well, and they are motivated to pay special attention to the quality of the studies.

4. References

Herrington, J., Reeves, T.C & Oliver, R. (2010). *A guide to authentic e-learning*. London and New York: Routledge.

Authentic learning: Elements of authentic learning as evaluation criteria, http://authenticlearning.info/AuthenticLearning/Evaluation_files/Evaluation_3.pdf

EFMD Global Network (2016) EOCCS Standards and Criteria, http://www.efmdgn.org/eoccs (2018 version)

JAMK quality criteria for online pedagogy, https://studyguide.jamk.fi/globalassets/opinto-opas-amk/koulutusohjelmat-ja-opintotarjonta/opintotarjonta-ja-tyojarjestykset/verkko-opinnot/jamk-online-quality-criteria-2017.pdf

Opetushallitus (2006) Verkko-oppimateriaalin laatukriteerit, https://www.oph.fi/download/47132_verkko-oppimateriaalin_laatukriteerit.pdf

Uutta avointa energiaa -hankkeen laatukortit, https://uusiavoinenergia.fi/materiaalit/laatukortit/