FTA documentation
Deliverable D6a: Quality Assurance Plan

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Content

Quality Assurance within the FTA - introduction

The FTA is at the beginning of 2010 a project where various partners develop a learning environment for free software.

The ambition is to let the project in the future transform to a structural activity where the partners develop and deliver open learning content.

The scope of this QA plan is both the project phase and the phase where the (old and new) partners will cooperate structurally to fill in the objectives of the FTA, eventually by offering Joined Degrees.

Quality assurance measures will be first applied and tested during the pilot phase of the FTA project. Results of the pilot phase will be evaluated for regular use in (international) programs about free technology.

For the QA processes this means that continues improvement over various development and delivery cycles can be seen as a basic working principle.

The interpretation of Quality Assurance within the FTA[1]:

> "a set of predetermined systematic actions applicable within the framework of quality assurance with the purpose of ensuring that the producers or final users get a standard quality product or service. It consists of separate yet connected activities: quality control and quality assessment"

For Quality planning the interpretation would be:

> "actions which determine the goals and demands for quality as well as for the application of elements of quality systems"

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1   http://www.unizg.hr/tempusprojects/glossary.htm

The QA plan has the objective to monitor and improve the quality of the educational program of the FTA, consisting of various modules. The QA is concerned with both the quality of the educational processes, the supporting processes and the quality of the educational products.

Quality assurance is a permanent process that is incorporated in the management cycle of an educational program.

Perspective: learner

Quality assurance with respect to the educational processes within the the Free Technology Academy from the perspective of the learner addresses:

- study content and curriculum

- assessment

- educational processes

- people involved

- supporting systems.

The results of the survey will be presented anonymously to the management of the FTA-project with the intent to improve the modules on all aspects.

Quality assurance with respect to the supporting (non-educational) processes within the the Free Technology Academy addresses:

- marketing

- administration (enrollment, payment, certification)

Perspective: management

The modules in the FTA are built upon modules and modulare materials that have been in use for a long time. In fact, a large part of the modules has been part of the UOC's Master Programme in Free Software since 2003. In the context of the FTA, these modules and module books have been updated and translated into English and adapted to meet the requirements of the various partners. The Quality Assurance measures of the modules used by the FTA have already undergone an extensive QA-process[2].

The acquired competences and learning outcomes for each module module have been defined with respect to the **European eCompetence Framework**[3] and the **ACM Computing Classification**

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2 MEMORIA para la solicitud de VERIFICACION DE TÍTULO MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN SOFTWARE LIBRE
3 The European e-Compentence Framework: http://www.ecompetences.eu/

[System](#)[4].

The learning outcomes for each module are thus described in terms of [5]:

- competences attained

- knowledge acquired

- competence area and proficiency level acquired

- topic domains the attained knowledge and acquired competences can be related to.

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4   The 1978 ACM Computing Classification System: http://www.acm.org/about/class/1998
5   Deliverable D5 http://freeknowledge.eu/fta-wiki/index.php/Category:WP4

Processes and stakeholders within the FTA

Processes and actors at the strategic level

The FTA Board is the central management level within the FTA that is responsible for all the activities within the FTA and thus also for the QA measures.

The FTA Board has established a joint Scientific Council[6] with recognised international specialists to oversee QA procedures in relation to: the curricula and learning materials-, learner performance, tutors, learning facilities and outcomes of assessment. Quality aspects are assessed and improved before, during and after each run of a course or a complete program.

The Scientific council is asked periodically to give its opinion on each of the aspects:

- the curriculum

- the products from module production

- QA reports for the management consisting of the reports about the opinions of students and teachers about module delivery, module support and assessment.

Managers that are responsible for educational programs within educational institutions that recognise modules from the FTA , should find in the QA measures guaranties for the quality of the FTA-modules.

The QA processes will also help the management to convince (future) recognition committees to judge the scientific level of the FTA programme.

The definition and implementation of the curriculum is the central concern at the strategic level. The FTA Board is responsible for the strategic decisions about the curriculum and asks the Scientific Council for advice.

Based on the advice from Scientific Council and the tactical and operational level (see next chapter), the FTA Board will take the initiative (mostly by creating a team) to:

- change the curriculum

- revise a module

- improve the learning support, assessment or the Electronic Learning Environment

- improve the supporting processes.

In a static situation a two year cycle could be kept at the strategic level: the first year of such a cycle could be used to evaluate the program in the past and the second year could be used to make

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6   A charter for the Scientific Council is available at http://freeknowledge.eu/fta-wiki/images/1/1e/Deliverable_D6b.odt

decisions about future changes.

The different aspects of the FTA activities undergo extensive quality reviews and quality procedures are built into the various processes and are regularly reviewed by the Quality Assurance team.

Processes and actors at the tactical and operational level

The central concern at the tactical and operational level is the learning module.

The Board has divided the activities on the tactic and operational level in work packages (and teams related to each Work Package) during the pilot phase. The specific teams are responsible for: the virtual campus, module development, certification and recognition, the pilot programme and dissemination and network building. In so-called Execom meetings the activities of the teams are discussed regularly and geared to one another. See for the organisational structure the FTA website[7].

In the delivery phase of the module, the team of teachers in a module is responsible for the educational processes in this module. During the pilot phase each module is delivered in one or more runs.

The opinions of the learners with respect to the module are gathered using questionnaires after each run. Also the logs of the Electronic Learning Environment are collected and analysed to get an impression of how the learning environment is used in practice[8].

The teachers active in a run fill in a specific questionnaire to express there opinion about the module and the study process. All the questionnaires are combined and presented to the team of teachers who then can comment the various results and can propose improvements to the study content, the desired learning outcomes and all aspects of the study processes.

The team of teachers are stimulated to use peer reviews to improve there personal skills and attitudes in supporting the learning processes.

These evaluations are then combined in a report for the run of the module and presented to the FTA Board. Decisions about the curriculum will then be based on these evaluation reports and general opinions about market perspectives, interests from educational institutions etc.

The reports are also made available in the learning environments. Care will be taken to protect the staff participating by limiting the personal information in the reports; so judgments about individual persons will be removed from the reports that are presented to the learners.

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7   http://ftacademy.org/about/project
8   A description of the way in which the opinions are collected is available at http://freeknowledge.eu/fta-wiki/images/4/48/Deliverable_D6c.odt

The periods that are used in the evaluation and planning cycle could very, depending on the natural evaluation periods within an educational organisation. An educational institute which has a semester system should base the evaluation on this cycle. In other organisations a yearly cycle would fit more natural in institutional processes.

Based on a one year cycle, the opinions of the staff should be gathered every year.

The QA-team (wp4-team) is responsible for the collection of evaluation-data and the creation of the evaluation reports. A Quality Assurance role is necessary after the project phase to guarantee for an independent analysis of the available information from questionnaires and loggings.

Recognition and certification

A specific aspect for the Free Technology Academy to take into account is the need to let the quality assurance facilitate the transfer of credits internationally, both within Europe (based on the Bologna objectives) but also world wide.

The FTA modules are co-organised by the FTA partners and are a complement to their existing bachelor or master programmes. After completing a module successfully, the learner can obtain an FTA certificate for that particular module. These certificates are recognised by the partner universities. Each of the participating educational organisations will make a statement about the recognition of the modules as part of their programmes. These statements will be annex to the consortium agreement.

The consortium partner will investigate the options for joint international degrees. The initial course programme of the FTA contains 8 course modules at master level, each 5 ECTS credits. As a complete Master Programme comprises at least 60 ECTS, the FTA currently offers only a part of that. The FTA is seeking to expand its programme and the network of universities that recognise and make use of the FTA. Currently, the FTA is working on the development of a full Master Programme in Free Software and invites interested universities to become partner in its Associate Network and participate in the task force for such joint curriculum.