The project
“Open Food Innovation University" - OFINU
No.101128855

THE OPEN FOOD INNOVATION UNIVERSITY QUALITY ASSURANCE METHODOLOGY (D5.1)

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

THE DOCUMENT PROPERTIES

Deliverable No.	D5.1
Deliverable Title	Open Food Innovation University Quality Assurance Methodology (QAM)
Language	English
Lead beneficiary	P1 Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU)
Due date of deliverable	Mo.9
Actual submission date	10.06.2025
Dissemination level	Public

DOCUMENT HISTORY

The table provides the actual version number, the author implementing the updated version, the date of the version, the name of the person approving the version, the date that version was approved, and a brief description of the reason for revision.

Version No	*Issued by*	*Revision date*	*Approved by*	*Approval date*	*Short description, reason for updating*
1.0	Irīna Kulitāne, project manager, P1 LBTU	x	Approved by the partners.	06/06/2025	x

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The document has been elaborated within the project “Open Food Innovation University" – OFINU, No.101128855, being in implementation of the consortium of Uzbekistan’s, Tajikistan’s and European Union universities, as well private sector partners from involved Central Asia countries. The project is in implementation with financial support of the European Union Erasmus+ Programme. The period of the Grant agreement covers time period from 1st February 2024 till 31st January 2027.

The Open Food Innovation University Quality Assurance Methodology (QAM) (further in the document named – QAM) is a document setting procedures for assurance of quality of an Open University, developed and adopted in five partner universities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The QAM is a tool, supporting these partner universities with structured, clear and systematic evaluation approach of the new formation – an Open University, which creates the preconditions for the timely identification of challenges and risks and planning of measures for necessary improvements of content and processes.

The Quality Assurance Methodology is including description of quality indicators, procedures and criteria for assessing and measuring of an Open University quality. The document is subject for amendment and updating.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. OFINU PROJECT SUMMARY

Overall objective - to modernise food innovation and technology related higher education in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, thereby increasing the quality and ensuring relevance of the higher education to the needs of the socio-economic growth of the countries concerned and especially of their regions.

Specific objectives:

1. Improve the quality of food processing related higher education in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, enhance its relevance for the needs and interests of sustainable national economies, labour market and societies.
2. Create and implement innovative study form for increase of level of knowledge, skills and competencies of students and external learners, thus increasing their competitiveness in the labour market and employability potential of students.
3. Promote inclusive education, create learning opportunities for the external learners of different age, social background and geographic locations.
4. Ensure professional development for academic and administrative staff in order to impact the quality of higher education provided by the involved HEIs in the longer term.
5. Stimulate cooperation of universities and business, exchange of good practice, develop and test the study modules with and within enterprises, thus enhancing relevance of higher education to the respective business sector.
6. Enhance internationalisation of Central Asia higher education institutions and capacity to network effectively.

Partners of the project:

- **Lead partner/Coordinator**: Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (P1 LBTU)
- **In Uzbekistan**: Samarkand Agro-innovations and Research University (P2 SAMARU), Andijan Institute of Agriculture and Agro-technologies (P3 AIAA)
- **In Tajikistan**: Technological University of Tajikistan (P4 TUT), Kulob Institute of Technology and Innovation Management (P5 KITIM), Isfara Branch of the Technological University of Tajikistan (P6 BTUTI)
- **In Slovakia**: Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (P7 SUA).

Associated partners:

There are six associated partners – five food production companies and one food processors' organization involved in the project. They are:

- **In Uzbekistan:** Fruit and vegetable processing sector - a group of companies "AGROMIR", Fruit and vegetable processing sector - the company "Navigul" MCHJ QK, Cereal processing sector - "Samarqand don mahsulotlari" JC (Samarkand grain products).
- **In Tajikistan:** Dairy processing sector - CJSC "Combinati Shiri Dushanbe", Meat processing sector - limited liability company "Orion Rustam", Association of Entrepreneurs of Khatlon.

Work packages (main groups of measures) and expected results of the project:

Work packages and main activities	*Expected results*
WP1 Creation of the environment for the Open Food Innovation University.	15 administrative staff trained and upskilled. Open university integrated (developed and adopted) at 5 Central Asia higher education institutions.
WP2 Design of the Open Food Innovation University study modules, tools and process.	7 study modules and workbooks elaborated and adopted. Digital platform created and functions well.

WP3 Central Asia universities' capacity building.	50 teachers trained and upskilled. Pilot production or quality evaluation equipment acquired for Central Asia higher education institutions.
WP4 Open Food Innovation University study process piloting.	Study modules piloted. At least 100 students and at least 60 external learners have participated.
WP5 Quality and sustainability measures.	Quality assurance methodology and Sustainability plan adopted.
WP6 Dissemination and promotion.	The project and its results promoted among internal and external stakeholders. Joint forum held.
WP7 Management and coordination.	Qualitative implementation of the project and achievement of all planned results ensured.

The Quality Assurance Methodology has been elaborated within the WP5.

2. FRAMEWORK OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY

Nature of an Open University

An open university is a form of studies in which

(1) teaching and learning takes place in a modular format and (2) full-time students participate together with other stakeholders - external learners. External learners are formally admitted at the university and take part in certain study modules, which they have timely preselected. During studies external learners are obtaining credits specified for each particular module, gradually accumulating credits allowing them to receive higher education diploma in a longer time perspective (after fulfilling the requirements set by the respective university). At the same time, the format of the open university provides synergy between the theory, provided by academic staff, and the practice, achieved and presented by respective business sector. This methodology will be used as pilot model for studies related to the food technology and innovation, but in the future it can be adapted to any field of studies offered in an Open University format.

Combination of knowledge and practice is a core of open university studies. This approach allows stakeholders to gain higher education through an individual approach to the choice of forms of study. It is especially significant for working adults who cannot join full time studies or off-site studies. At the same time full time students have opportunity to enrich knowledge with experience and practice, provided by the practitioners. Both target groups are beneficiaries. New form will ensure access to the higher education to various social groups.

Target groups of an Open University:

- Working specialists/professionals, needing flexible learning schedules.
- Adults returning to professional life and needing new knowledge and skills or updating existing ones.
- Persons without academic degree and/or qualification but willing to acquire such.
- People living in remote areas and having limited possibilities to study due to distance.

3. ENVIRONMENT AND EXISTING LEGAL BASE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY

3.1. IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan's development strategic targets and priorities are defined in the "Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026". The OFINU project implementation supports making progress in two strategic priorities: (1) To pursue just and fair public policies & human capital development, what in its turn helps (2) To develop a robust national economy that ensures rapid growth. A range of measures, set in the Strategy for achievement of these priorities, and supporting instruments, provided by the Government via public authorities

The OFINU project implementation is relevant to the targets of the Education Sectoral Plan of Uzbekistan, elaborated and adopted to promote positive change of the education sector. Specially to overcome challenges referring to the higher education: disconnection between HEIs and employers, insufficient relevance of knowledge and skills of new professionals after graduation of universities, graduates lack of cognitive skills and ability to take knowledge and practice-based decisions. An Open University contains elements and approaches needed to develop and successfully implement curriculum focusing on the latest scientifically justified knowledge, to increase capacity of courses graduates to apply the knowledge and to develop critical thinking skills.

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on education, adopted by the Legislative Chamber and approved by the Senate in 2020, clearly states role and responsibility of universities to provide retraining and advanced training of specialists, ensuring deepening and updating of professional knowledge, skills and abilities, and serving to improve the categories, degrees, ranking and titles of specialists.

Uzbekistan's universities, involved in the OFINU project, have a delegated responsibility and task assigned by the State President and the Ministry of Education, to develop new forms of teaching and to introduce innovative methods to encourage training of specialists who have capacity to respond effectively in a forward-looking manner to the objectives and needs of economic development. The establishment and implementation of the open university, and the accompanying measures, lead to creation of such an education offer.

3.2. IN TAJIKISTAN

The development of human capital is defined as the priority in the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period up to 2030. The Government has set up a vision to develop profile universities, recognized within the global scientific - educational space, having capacity and being able to promote development of knowledge - driven economy.

To achieve progress significant improvements are foreseen for the higher education sector. Development of teaching staff academic and research capacities; flexibility of educational programs, including through the introduction of module-based programs and ensuring the link between professional knowledge and practical skills are encouraged. Development of educational standards for professions in various fields, inter alias food processing, with the involvement of enterprises and organizations and implementation of education system on the basis of enterprises, as well establishment of production-based learning platforms are planned.

The OFINU project implementation is relevant to the targets of the Strategy, and an Open University study form is relevant to and supported by national level legal documents: (1) Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on additional education (adopted in 2021), aimed to promote obtaining a new profession, retraining, improvement of qualifications, in general educational and professional institutions outside the main educational programs or in educational institutions of additional education without restriction. (2) Concept for the development of productive employment in the Republic of Tajikistan up to 2040 (adopted in 2022), which, among other measures, includes adaptation of the labour force knowledge, skills and competencies to the needs of the labour market.

4. INVOLVED UZBEKISTAN'S AND TAJIKISTAN'S UNIVERSITIES

4.1. SAMARKAND AGROINNOVATION AND RESEARCH UNIVERSITY (SAMARU)

SAMARU was founded in accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministries of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2020 and is located in Samarkand city (Uzbekistan). The main task of the University is to provide comprehensive knowledge and skills for implementation of innovative resource-saving technologies in all areas of the agricultural sector and food processing.

SAMARU has two 2 faculties: Faculty of agrobiology and the Faculty of Agribusiness and logistics. There are 6 departments under the structure of faculties: Department of Plant science and Fruit and Vegetable, Department of Agro chemistry, Soil Science and Plant Protection, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Economics, Sustainable Agriculture and Digital Technologies, Department of Processing of Agricultural Products and Mechanization and Department of Fundamental Sciences.

The study and scientific profile of SAMTSAU includes total of 18 undergraduate programmes, 16 graduate programmes and 6 PhD programmes.

SAMTSAU has made a major contribution to the development of education standards, model curricula, model training modules, improving "Classification of areas and specialties of higher education".

More information: http://samaguni.uz/

4.2. ANDIJAN INSTITUTE AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-TECHNOLOGIES (AIAA)

AIAA is the main university in the Ferghana valley, Uzbekistan. It delivers bachelor, master and PhD level education. The main objectives of the University include the sustainable development of agriculture, resource saving, environmentally friendly agricultural technologies and protection of farm animals from different diseases.

There are five faculties at the University: Agrobiology; Storage and processing of agricultural products; Agribusiness and digital economy; Crop protection, agrochemistry and soil sciences; Agroengineering and hydro melioration.

AIAA has well established research laboratories and experimental farms where didactic and research activities are implemented. A number of projects in processing of agricultural products have been implemented in cooperation with the region's farms and processors.

More information: www.andqxai.uz

4.3. TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF TAJIKISTAN (TUT)

TUT is a higher education institution working under supervision of ***the Ministry of Industry and new technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan. It is*** located in Dushanbe city (Tajikistan)**.** The mission of the University is to provide qualitative, affordable education transformed through the development of scientific and educational technologies to educate highly qualified, competitive, creative specialists having capacity to contribute to the modernization of the national economy, technological development and the formation of an innovative economy of the Republic of Tajikistan.

The University prepares highly qualified specialists in diverse specialization areas: Information and Communication Technologies, Food and Light Industrial Technologies, Management, Economics and Design. TUT has eight faculties and 23 graduation departments, providing 41 study programmes. The Faculty of Food Technology is preparing specialists in area of food for food processing industry.

Having launched the credit system of education, there is freedom for elaboration of curriculum considering legislative requirements.

More information: https://tut.tj/

4.4. KULOB INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION MANAGEMENT (KITIM)

The founder and supervisor of the KITIM is the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Within four faculties 33 study programmes are provided (all levels: bachelor, master and doctoral). The Institute has two hectares large educational training base, four hectares of land plots and two hectares of fish-ponds used for training and practice of students.

KITIM is maintaining Innovation and technology park, Educational-training centre and other study and research units supporting acquisition of knowledge, development of technologies and innovation. Specialized study and research departments have been opened in region's food processing enterprises, therefore allowing to conduct practical, experimental and experimental classes for students, to carry research and to transfer scientific results to the business.

More information: www.dtmik.tj

4.5. BRANCH OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF TAJIKISTAN (BTUTI)

BTUTI provides higher education to the students within two faculties: the Faculty of Industrial and Information Technology and the Faculty of Economics and Management. The University offers 28 undergraduate programmes and 3 graduate programmes in 28 specialities. BTUTI strengths are tied to the field of Information technologies and Food technologies. Other fields of specialization are related to natural, engineering and social sciences.

Website: www.iftut.tj

5. LEARNING OUTCOMES OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDIES

Students, admitted for studies within an Open University, have to obtain the below described knowledge, skills and competences.

5.1. KNOWLEDGE

- Apply the theoretical and practical knowledge in food production, quality management and innovation derived from basic and special science courses.
- Ability to explain the most important concepts and regularities of food science.
- Ability to demonstrate specialised knowledge and critical understanding of the importance of research in the development of new food products.

5.2. SKILLS

- Ability to use knowledge in food production processes to plan, model and choose the most appropriate solution for food production, quality management and innovation development
- Ability to self-formulate, plan, structure, analyse, debate and demonstrate a scientific approach to the development of new products in collaboration with all respective stakeholders.

5.3. COMPETENCE

- Apply the acquired knowledge and skills in food production, quality management and the development of new products in a complex way.
- Plan, organise and implement quality management and development of new products in the food production company, using critical thinking and teamwork.
- Scientific research shall be capable of independently selecting and analysing scientific information and methods, describing the obtained information in analytical terms, using it in decision-making and problem solving in food production, quality management and innovation.

6. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY QUALITY

The quality assurance and management are underpinned by the following general principles:

- Meeting expectations and ensuring satisfaction of students - external learners, are in foci of the Open University
- Continuous improvement of the learning experience is the core of all quality assurance and enhancement activities
- Quality assurance processes include appropriate and balanced internal and external stakeholders' involvement for the quality of learning
- Quality assurance and enhancement is embedded into the respective university's organisational structures and processes, responding to and fulfilling the University's broader requirements for quality, at the same time allowing for continual change and development.

An Open university performance is considered qualitative if the institution, maintaining it, develops and delivers accessible, flexible, and effective education, where:

(1) study programmes and courses are designed and delivered by qualified subject matter experts,

(2) programmes and courses are accredited and respond to the best national and international higher education standards,

(3) real-relevance of knowledge and skills to the labour market and national economy is ensured,

(4) education is available regardless of geographical, economic, or social barriers,

(5) there are flexible study options,

(6) the most contemporary knowledge and teaching methods are applied,

(7) regular assessment of quality is ensured and continuous improvements are ongoing,

(8) contribution to socio-economic development is provided.

7. AN OPEN UNIVERSITY QUALITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

7.1. OVERVIEW OF THE CRITERIA

Below are described quality criteria, grouped in four blocks. They will be used for an Open University quality assessment and assurance.

No.1. Quality of study programmes, modules and courses, provided within an Open University

No.2. Accessibility, flexibility and support

No.3. Relevance to the needs and expectations of stakeholders

No.4. Socio-economic impact created ***(long term impact)***

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THE ASSESSMENT:

- *Academic staff, quality assurance department (self-assessment)*
- *Students and external learners' (short term direct beneficiaries)*
- *Business - industrial stakeholders' (short- and long-term beneficiaries)*
- *National and regional public authorities (long term beneficiaries)*
- *Society in general*

Each of the criteria will be assessed using the indicators on a scale of 1 to 4:

'4' for 'very good, excellent': in the context of criteria subject to assessment, the studies have been implemented at a very good or excellent level. There may be minor and insignificant deficiencies, but there is no significant need for eliminating them.

'3' for 'good': in the context of criteria subject to assessment, the studies have been implemented at a good level, in compliance with all requirements. Positive aspects predominate, and no significant deficiencies are found.

'2' for 'satisfactory': in the context of criteria subject to assessment, the studies have been implemented at a satisfactory level, in compliance with minimum requirements. The quality of implementation has a relatively high number of deficiencies, with major problems in certain aspects. In order to eliminate the deficiencies, it is necessary to develop and implement a plan with specific measures and deadlines, involving third parties and additional resources.

'1' for 'poor, not satisfactory': in the context of criteria subject to assessment, the studies have been implemented at a non-satisfactory level, as deficiencies that require significant improvements, involving third parties and additional resources, predominate.

7.2. LIST OF CRITERIA, ASSESSMENT INDICATORS AND METHODS TO BE USED

The approach developed encompasses a maximum number of criteria, which, if all used, will provide the best possible understanding of the quality of an Open University.

Criteria No.1. Quality of study programmes, modules and courses, provided within an Open University

Assessment criterion	*Indicator*	*Assessment method*
C1.1. Correspondence of modules and courses contents to the needs of respective industry and labour market	1.1.1. Modules and courses are designed and delivered by qualified subject matter experts, in collaboration with industry professionals 1.1.2. The compliance with the needs of a respective industry and labour market is substantiated 1.1.3. The areas of graduates' possible professional activity are defined	Analysis of content in light of economy and market demand; Meetings and round table discussions with respective stakeholders (public authorities, business organisations and enterprises)
C1.2. Compliance of modules and courses with the requirements of legal acts and regulations (external and internal)	1.2.1. The compliance of the modules and courses' content with requirements are clearly presented	Content analysis; Round table discussions with respective public authorities, business organisations and enterprises
C1.3. Integration of the latest knowledge and know-how of RTD (research and technological development) in the modules and courses	1.3.1. The modules and courses are regularly updated and reflect current RTD achievements, and economy and market needs	Comparative analysis: (a) analysis of modules and courses content; (b) analysis of the latest RTD trends
C1.4. Quality of the modules and courses	1.4.1. Strong and clear relationship between the study subjects and learning outcomes is provided, themes are suitable and sufficient to reach the expected learning outcomes	Comparative analysis
	1.4.2. The coherence of the learning outcomes and assessment methods is presented	Content analysis
	1.4.3. Best practices from the industry have been integrated in the content	Comparative analysis: (a) analysis of the latest industry development trends; (b) analysis of best practice application in the modules and courses
	1.4.4. Teaching and learning methods applied are highly appropriate	Self-assessment; Feedback from the external learners
	1.4.5. Teaching materials used are at high quality and are available in diverse format, allowing to use them in diverse ways (onsite in classes, remotely as independent work, digitally)	Analysis of the study materials content quality and formats
C1.5. Qualification and sufficiency of academic staff	1.5.1. Qualification and experience of teachers (academic staff) for achieving the expected learning outcomes is substantiated	Analysis of relevance of qualification and experience to the subjects
	1.5.2. Teachers, providing studies, have	Analysis of relevance of the

	required qualification and experience, and knowledge on the latest teaching methodologies	involved academic staff qualification and experience
	1.5.3. External experts, providing field-based expertise and practice-based knowledge, are attracted and involved in provision of studies	Data on external experts' involvement, analysis of their performance and impact on learning outcomes; Feedback from external learners
	1.5.4. Teachers' regularly upgrade their knowledge, skills and competencies	Self-assessment
C1.6. Adequacy and quality of the study infrastructure and material resources	1.6.1. The facilities (auditoriums, laboratories, equipment, including digital solutions) necessary for achievement of the intended learning outcomes, is substantiated	Analysis of relevance of predefined recourses
	1.6.2. The adequacy and suitability of the facilities (auditoriums, laboratories, equipment, including digital solutions) is ensured and their regular upgrading is ongoing	Analysis of relevance of available recourses
	1.6.3. Availability of enterprises-based facilities is ensured for field studies and for practice	Review of contracts with enterprises, providing facilities for enterprise-based studies; analysis of data on enterprises-based field studies
C1.7. Continuous assessment of the quality is ensured	1.7.1. Mechanisms and tools to ensure continuous assessment of the quality are elaborated and well-functioning	Self-assessment done by the academic staff; Quality audits

No.2. Accessibility, flexibility and support

Assessment criterion	*Indicator*	*Assessment method*
C2.1. Open University is widely promoted and acknowledged by potential stakeholders	2.1.1. Sound number of external learners have expressed interest about the studies and been admitted for studies 2.1.2. Sound number of external learners have been admitted based on request of enterprises	Data on persons who have applied for studies and have been admitted
C2.2. An Open University admission process is clear and user friendly	2.2.1. External learners find admission process easy and friendly	Feedback from external learners
C2.3. Open University coordination staff provide efficient support to the external learners	2.3.1. External learners have gained all required support throughout the whole study process	Feedback from external learners
C2.4. Academic staff is available and provide necessary support	2.4.1. External learners have gained all required support throughout the whole study process	Feedback from external learners
C2.5. Requirements for external learners are flexible, students can apply for changes	2.3.1. External learners have possibility to continue studies and to rearrange their schedule in case of necessity	Feedback from external learners

(observing main requirements)		
C2.6. Guidance tools are provided at all steps of the studies	2.6.1. Clear guidance tools are available	Feedback from external learners

No.3. Relevance of education, provided within an Open University, to the needs and expectations of stakeholders

Assessment criterion	*Indicator*	*Assessment method*
C3.1. Acquired knowledge, skills and competencies support external learners in their professional life and career development	3.1.1. Satisfaction of external learners with the study contents, materials, assessment methods 3.1.2. The compliance with the needs of a respective industry and labour market is substantiated	Interviews of the external learners; Questionnaires; Other relevant satisfaction assessment types
C3.2. Compatibility of students' knowledge, skills and competencies with the needs of employers	3.2.1. Knowledge, skills and competencies provided highly respond to the needs and expectations of employers	Interviews of the employers; Round table discussions with employers; Other relevant assessment types
C3.3. Effectiveness of the study process and resources	3.3.1. Satisfaction of external learners with study environment (processes, systems, methods applied, material resources)	Interviews of the external learners; Questionnaires; Other relevant assessment types
C3.4. Recognition of education obtained within an Open University format	3.4.1. Documents issued by university have legal power 3.4.2. Documents issued upon completion of studies are accepted by employers and other relevant stakeholders	Written and oral information, provided by external learners; Feedback from employers and other relevant stakeholders, obtained by questioning or using other assessment types

No.4. Socio-economic impact created (long term impact)

Assessment criterion	*Indicator*	*Assessment method*
C4.1. Improved performance of higher education institutions	4.1.1. Number of study programmes, modules and courses involved and provided in an Open University format 4.1.2. Annual number of external learners admitted and number of graduates 4.1.3. Compliance of study programmes, modules and courses with needs of a respective industry and labour market	Analysis of data on number of students, graduates career development in light of economy and market demand; Round table discussions with respective stakeholders; Internal audits, university level quality assessment
C4.2. More professional specialists relevant to the needs of economy, sectoral development, and labour market	4.2.1. Relevance of an Open University graduates' knowledge, skills and competence to the needs of economy, sectoral development, and labour market demand 4.2.2. Number and position of	Interviews of graduates and employers; Round table discussions with graduates and employers; Other relevant assessment forms

	graduates working in the field they have studied	
C4.3. Availability, adequacy and relevance of specialists/professionals to the needs of a respective industry	4.3.1. Companies can find qualified specialists (external resources), and they are highly competent, i.e., have capacity to develop and implement innovation 4.3.2. Companies can develop capacity of an existing staff without significant implications on the regular production process	Analysis of regional and/or national economy; Feedback from employers; Other relevant assessment forms
C4.4. Improved access to higher education for residents of rural regions	4.4.1. Already working individuals can acquire higher education or improve qualification without significant implications on working and family life 4.4.2. Individuals searching for growths possibilities, can acquire higher education or new qualification	Research of societal needs and benefits; Feedback from students and graduates

8. QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS

An Open University internal quality assurance system represents a continuous cyclic process aimed at continuously improving existing and developing the new content and forms of studies, allowing to anyone being interested, to acquire education in a pace and scope adopted to real life possibilities.

The internal quality assurance system is based on E. Deming's cycle (plan-do-check-act). In order to ensure data-based decision-making ("plan" stage), as well as to assess the effectiveness of improvement and enhancement measures or the internal quality assurance system ("check" stage), there have to be staff responsible for the assessment process: setting targets, collecting data, involving all required structural units, analysing findings and ensuring continuous an Open University development and improvements.

Open University quality assurance process activities:

- enhancement and development of the modules, courses and study programmes they are embedded;
- planning and controlling the implementation of the studies;
- continuous enhancing the modules and courses;
- analysis and updating of learning outcomes;
- analysis of material and technological resources;
- provision of methodologies and information for the study process;
- regular self-assessment and reporting progress, success and weaknesses;
- regular assessment of direct and indirect stakeholders' satisfaction;
- planning and adoption of measures aimed to improve quality and to avoid risks of non-compliance to needs and expectations of stakeholders

9. ADOPTION OF THE METHODOLOGY

Higher education institutions, developing and adopting an Open University as a new study form, can adapt criteria responding and fitting to the internal quality assurance systems and mechanisms, as well nature of study programmes, modules, and courses provided by each respective higher education institution in an Open University format.

In view of the different mechanisms functioning within respective Central Asia universities - partners of the OFINU project, during the first two years after the implementation of the methodology, universities are allowed to use a limited number of criteria, gradually working towards adoption all of them. The period of transition has to be completed within 3-4 years after completion of the OFINU project, as part of which the QAM is developed.

In developing the methodology, the experience and approaches of the Central Asian universities involved in the implementation of documents of similar importance were taken into account. As a result, experienced quality assessors might see it as “too simple.” However, there is justification for this approach: the introduction of new forms of study is a complex process and the setting of over-quality requirements at an initial stage could lead to situations where initial performance and results are underestimated, thus calling into question the usefulness of the new form of study. The universities involved aim to animate and strengthen the new study format by gradually increasing its scope and reinforcing requirements.