

Appendix 3: Quality Conduct 1.0 Under Review

An internal review of the Quality Conduct 1.0 took its start immediately after the institutional review in 2016. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the Education Department organized **evaluation interviews with each faculty** (i.e. Director of Studies and faculty quality assurance staff). A systematic and structured feedback collection had the aim of implementing targeted and results-oriented improvements. Since the information was gathered first-hand immediately after a period of intensive user experiences with the portfolios, it played an important role in the development of the Education Monitors in SharePoint.

On 23 May 2018, the Education Department additionally launched a **survey** to 805 Ghent University staff and students who had been involved in the peer learning process, either as visitor or as visitee. The survey was closed on 6 June 2018, counting 270 completed questionnaires (i.e. a response rate of 34%).

Lastly, five **focus group meetings** (breakfast sessions) took place in the same month, during which the survey results were discussed in detail. The feedback round - the open questions as well as the focus group meetings - highlighted many positive aspects of the peer learning system and an appreciation for the general approach. At the same time, it revealed a number of points to consider, all relating to the following aspects:

1. Peer Learning Visits: the Concept

- the fact that during peer learning visits, peers were asked to assess and score each other and publish that score on the Ghent University Study Guide was found to be overly judgmental, and therefore too reminiscent of the external quality assessments of old. This approach might also unintentionally pave the way to more institutionalized window dressing;
- the focus of peer learning visits proved to be muddled, holding an ambiguous middle between process evaluation and content-specific evaluation. Clarifying these moot points by means of clear frameworks and pre-conditions was seen as a crucial improvement action. In addition, the members of the professorial staff regretted the fact that so little attention was paid to programme content. A visiting team with only one expert from the field could insufficiently cover that aspect;
- the peer learning visits were shown to bring about a considerable administrative burden, and to require an investment of time disproportionate to the outcome. Participants in the feedback round explicitly asked for a demonstrable reduction of the administrative burden and a greater efficiency.

2. The Tool: Minerva Portfolios

- the Minerva portfolio was considered to be an instrument that involved a lot of preparatory work, and too static a tool to integrate into study programmes (study programme committees) day-to-day workings;
- performing a systematic check on all 55 processes and the more than 100 indicators that lie at the heart of the portfolio had turned out to be a highly complex exercise, not in the least because study programmes had to delve into UGI themselves to uncover the relevant data. The digital portfolios, in other words, raised (too) many impediments to systematic, data-driven decision-making and quality assurance. They did not turn out to be the dashboard tool for policy support they were meant to be.

3. Support Services

- the peer learning component was perceived as positive, but the design of the visit as a kind of internal quality assessment (in Dutch “visitatie”) was an obstacle to conducting an open discussion aimed at mutual learning. There was a strong demand to be able to meet as equals and discuss specific elements with a greater focus on learning from each other;
- participants had an outspoken interest in the development of support services, which would come into effect after the peer learning visit, and which would consist of tailor-made coaching initiatives.

4. The Role of the Education Department and the Education Quality Board

- organizing and coordinating the peer learning visits also turned out to be an intensive process for the Education Department’s (in Dutch: DOWA) support services. ‘Peer visiting’ each of the more than one hundred Ghent University study programmes would take over five years, which is too long to monitor any quality culture properly;
- judging by, among other things, data available in UGI and information gained during the Annual Quality Meeting, we could safely state that education quality and quality assurance in most study programmes was up to standards. In those cases, an overly judgmental peer learning visit was not a suitable action to encourage further quality improvement;
- the original plan was to “peer visit” every study programme in a six-year cycle. The cyclical nature of these visits, with a surge of (preparatory) activities the run-up to, during and in the immediate aftermath of the visit, did not result in the anticipated focus on a continuous process of quality improvement.

The review of the Quality Conduct 1.0 and the resulting stakeholder feedback was one of the factors that prompted a thorough update of our internal quality assurance system.