

Appendix 6: Running the Education Monitor

1. Context

Ghent University's Quality Conduct 1.0 (in Dutch: ERGO, see Appendix 1) was built on running a **PDCA cycle** at three policy levels: (1) the study programme, (2) the faculty and (3) the institution. This PDCA system will also be the engine of the Quality Conduct 2.0. Each policy level has a vision and policy plans (Plan); they implement concomitant actions (Do); they monitor the expected results of these actions (Check); and draw up an improvement plan containing specific improvement act (Act).

In order to embed the PDCA cycle in day-to-day working the Education Council decided in 2015 to develop **faculty and study programme portfolios**. The aim was to encourage faculties and study programmes to properly monitor their education policy and quality assurance processes and concomitant actions, and to enable monitoring at a central and decentralized level.

In the run-up to the first institutional review, the portfolios were integrated into Ghent University's learning environment **Minerva**. Using the existing platform resulted in a relatively swift implementation. However, it also had various drawbacks. Particularly in terms of contents, the portfolios quickly took on different shapes and sizes. The Ghent University community also perceived the portfolios as an accountability tool (which resulted in an information overload) rather than a monitoring tool. As a consequence, **support** for the tool quickly dwindled among its users.

After extensive consultation with all parties involved (including Programme Committee chairs, quality assurance staff, the Education Council, the Education Quality Board), discussion sessions in various task forces, and a close co-operation between the ICT Department and the Education Department, a migration from Minerva to SharePoint was decided upon with the purpose of drastically **simplifying the system** (see also Appendix 3: Quality Conduct 1.0 Under Review). This simplified system was meant to support faculties and study programmes in setting up qualitative and data-driven self-reflection processes based on the PDCA cycle.

The new platform would house a crucial and more dynamic tool for continuous self-reflection and quality assurance. The term 'portfolio', therefore, was hardly appropriate anymore. Instead, we opted for the term '**Education Monitor**'. These Education Monitors enable study programmes, faculties and the Education Department to monitor (complex) processes and specific themes continuously.

2. A Short Overview of the Monitor Data Model

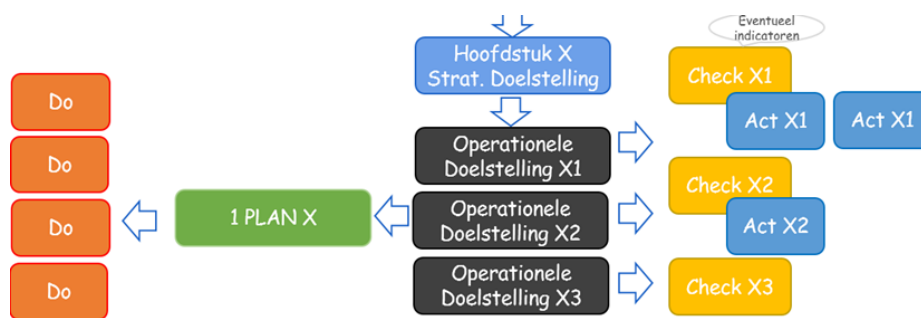
The emphasis of the new tool will be on **operational objectives**. Specific sets of operational objectives have been determined for faculties and study programmes. Supported by the data available in UGI, and based on the PDCA cycle, the faculties and study programmes annually engage in self-reflection to check to what extent the

operational objectives are being met. The new approach also makes a **clear distinction** between a relatively **stable 'Plan-Do phase'** on the one hand, and a more **dynamic 'Check-Act phase'** on the other.

The operational objectives for faculty and study programme (28 resp. 39) take into account the government's Quality Code for Higher Education (dd. 18 May 2018) and its eight quality characteristics, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, dd.2015) and Ghent University's **six strategic education objectives**.

The above-mentioned operational objectives were determined and fine-tuned in close consultation with the faculties and study programmes, and were ratified by the Education Council.

Schematically, the data model is presented as follows.



1.1. The Education Monitor's Stable Part: Plan-Do

As mentioned above, the Education Monitor consists of a stable and a more dynamic part. To this end, various operational objectives were clustered under an overarching chapter (e.g. 'Master's Dissertation'; 'Education Based on Excellent Research'; 'Embedding the External Perspective'). Chapter per chapter, study programmes describe their vision and general policy intentions ('Plan'), together with any current actions that put vision and policy intentions into practice ('Do'). This is the Education Monitor's relatively stable part. It is recommended to elaborate Plans and Dos in a sustainable and easily accessible way, so that outsiders leafing through the Monitor can form a clear picture of a programme's/faculty's vision, policy and policy implementation relatively quickly. The best approach is to record information as concisely as possible, and to refer to generic information in the faculty's Education Monitor as much as possible. Text fields in the new SharePoint environment have been limited for that purpose. Providing additional information in attachments or via hyperlinks must be well-thought over.

The information in this section of the Education Monitor must be the result of, and supported by the entire Programme Committee. To facilitate the writing process, information from the old portfolios can be recycled in the form of brief summaries, then to be reviewed, and ultimately ratified, by the Programme Committee. The Programme Committee can also suggest a distribution of work, assigning specific chapters to specific members, based on their expertise.

Since the Education Monitor contains a summary of policy intentions, day-to-day working and improvement policy of the study programme, access rights are best given to all the main stakeholders (i.e. student representatives, lecturers, academic and teaching assistants, support staff, advisory council, work field committees, etc...).

1.2. The Education Monitor's Dynamic Part: Check-Act

The Education Monitor's Plan-Do part encompasses the various operational objectives that have been defined per chapter. These operational objectives must be assessed (Check) and, depending on the outcome, can result in specific improvement actions (Act). This, in other words, is the Education Monitor's dynamic part.

The **entire Programme Committee** reflects on the extent to which the operational objectives have been met at least **annually**. It might be useful to involve consultation bodies with a broader representation (internal Quality Assurance Unit, advisory council, professional field committee...) to (help) prepare this check.

One way of substantiating the 'check' is to make use of the indicators that are automatically generated by UGI. A number of UGI reports are automatically displayed in the monitor. These UGI reports show programme-specific figures and progress reports, and also specific frames of reference (i.e. the figures for the entire university and the figures for the faculty to which the study programme belongs). In addition to these pre-set indicators, a faculty/ study programme can also use its own data as an indicator in the Education Monitor (e.g. results of a Master's dissertation survey that they organized themselves). For many objectives, the check can and will (also) be done based on qualitative information. Much of this qualitative information can/will already be described in the chapter's respective Do. With a simple reference to this Do, the checks can be done quickly.

In other words, study programmes keep their own tabs on the extent to which a particular operational objective has been achieved by means of a **four-point scale**: red – yellow – green – blue.

- 'RED' ("We do not meet the objective. Critical intervention with a strict follow-up are needed");
- 'YELLOW' ("We meet the objectives on the main issues. Clear actions are identified to remedy the deficiencies");
- 'GREEN' ("We meet the objectives in a demonstrable way. Improvement measures are planned where necessary");
- 'BLUE' ("We largely meet the objectives. There are good practices that are exemplary and worth following").

Depending on their analysis, study programmes then define the necessary **improvement actions** (Acts). These acts, in turn, are the basis for a study programme's/faculty's future improvement policy. SharePoint allows for an automatic aggregations of any validated acts into a **quality improvement plan**. This quality improvement plan contains an action plan, an actor, a timing and progress report for each act. This quality improvement plan can be 'extracted' from the Education Monitor at any time so that it forms the basis for the improvement policy within the Programme Committee and the faculty's Quality Assurance Unit.

3. A Tool for Faculties & Study Programmes

The Education Monitor for faculties and study programmes is an actual working tool for monitoring education policy and quality assurance. Unlike the portfolios of old, the Monitors are no longer an open repository for a

plethora of information, or a platform for window dressing. It is a dynamic and useful tool that supports and stimulates a structured reflection on education within the faculty/study programme. Critical self-evaluation takes centre stage. If properly carried out and followed up, it will result in a structural lightening of the internal quality assurance system (Quality Conduct).