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Model for ENU
- executive summary

e Learning
Designing Tomorrow's Education

WP1 WP2 WP3 WP4 WP5 WP6



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mENU Model for a European Networked University for e-learning

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Preface

Partners in this project had previously been involved with national and European e-learning projects, and intended here to model a networked university that would be able to offer international and cross institutional study programmes. Several obstacles were met at different levels, academic traditions, institutional rules and regulations, national laws, and the lack of practical adherence to the Bologna declaration. The e-Learning Initiative by the European Commission urged for provision of flexible learning and competence building,

- *to design tomorrow's education*
- *to foster the European dimension of joint development of ICT-mediated and ICT-complimented curricula*
- *to support trans-national virtual meeting places*
- *to provide support and initial funding for sustainable and scalable projects, which establish at the European level new quality networks, contents and services in the field of e-learning*
- *virtual European universities, based on partnerships and cooperation with other universities*

The project proposed to meet some of these targets. To comply with the defined goals for the project, tasks were divided into smaller parts, work packages, with a responsible leader for each part. First a series of background material was analysed and organized into separate plans for strategy, business, organisation, studies and quality assurance etc. Next some of the practical challenges were tested in a practical demonstrator of two master degree programmes, evaluation was done and the final model is now presented in a report. Staff members from the partner institutions have worked conscientiously over a period of two years, bringing their ideas and varied experiences into the final products. The project group now hopes that the full report, our suggestion for the organization of a European Networked University, the ENU, will be an inspiration, a source of ideas, and function as guidelines in the process of creating a real provider of net based learning, a sustainable organization that will be to the benefit of European citizens in search for higher education. The partners feel they have laid the basis for the establishment of such a network of academic institutions. This document is a summary of the main points in the full description of the model. For more details and a complete outline of different aspects of the model, please take a closer look at the more extensive report.

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Introduction

On June 19, 1999, 29 European Ministers in charge of higher education signed in **Bologna the Declaration on establishing the European area of higher education by 2010** and promoting the European System of higher education world-wide. The Ministers affirmed in the Bologna Declaration their intention to:

- adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (Diploma Supplement)
- adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- establish a system of credits (such as ECTS)
- promote mobility by overcoming obstacles
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance
- promote European dimensions in higher education

Two years later it was followed by the **Prague Communiqué** where the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), took note of the constructive assistance of the European Commission, made comments on the further process with regard to the different objectives of the Bologna Declaration. In addition they emphasised as important elements of the European Higher Education Area:

- lifelong learning
- involvement of students
- enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area to other parts of the world (including the aspect of transnational education)

In September 2003, in the **Berlin Communiqué**, the Ministers reaffirmed the social dimension of the Bologna Process. Here the Ministers added 2 additional actions:

- European Higher Education Area and European Research Area - two pillars of the knowledge based society, promoting closer link to develop a Europe of Knowledge
- Stocktaking to provide reliable information on how progress is actually advancing, especially in relation to: quality assurance, two-cycle system and recognition of degrees and periods of studies

The e-Learning Initiative taken by the European Commission in Brussels, has led to The eLearning Action Plan[1] and the allocation of funding for several projects. This is an action to boost the change from traditional education to systematic applications of ICT for the provision of flexible learning and competence building - *Designing tomorrow's education*, as the Commission says.
In its resolution of July 2001 the Council of the EU invited the member states to 16 different actions, and also urged the EU Commission

[1]COM(2001)172 final, Brussels, 28.3.2001 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning/doc_en.html

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- to continue supporting existing European portals and to encourage the development of other portals to facilitate access to educational content and to promote collaboration and exchange of experiences in the area of e-Learning and pedagogical development, especially with a view to:
- support trans-national virtual meeting places
- stimulate European networking at all levels and in this context establish and provide net works for the benefit of teacher training,
- support directories of existing quality Internet resources

Under the initiative the Commission issued a call for proposals[2], with focus on e-learning and virtual European universities, based on partnerships and cooperation with other universities - - - and for European degrees combining courses and materials from different universities. The mENU project was initiated by 11 partners in 7 countries who tried to implement some of the ideas behind this call.

Strategy for ENU

ENU aims at taking a portion of the emerging e-learning market, which complements and adds value to the conventional educational and training institutions. Thus, ENU is not in competition with these institutions. ENU should be regarded as a well defined autonomous and virtual network among existing traditional universities that agree to collaborate in the formation of graduate degree programs and lifelong learning programs via sharing, exchanging or adapting on-line courses. ENU should not be a legal entity but it provides the framework for the collaboration of institutions for the joint creation and provision of e-learning programmes of study.

The target group of ENU is postgraduate students and lifelong learners. But ENU will grant no postgraduate degrees, certificates, or diplomas. These will in each case be granted by the "host" university, i.e. the partner university which is in charge of the actual programme.

Principal ENU goals

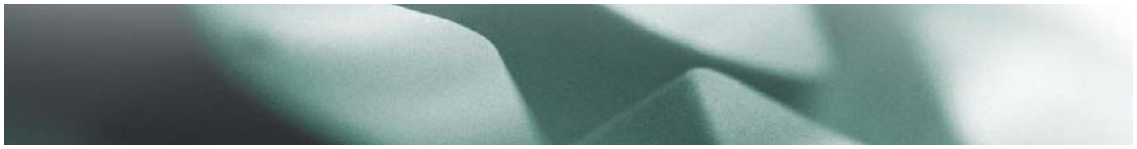
The primary goals of ENU may be expressed as follows:

- To enrich the portfolio of the programmes offered by the ENU institutions today. New programmes will be collaboratively designed, directed and delivered within ENU. All programmes will use human resources and learning content from ENU institutions
- To fulfil a demand that exists in the market for programmes covering new topics due to technological and cultural evolution, or not available yet due to lack of human and other recourses at a single university
- To guarantee high quality of the ENU programmes through pooling of ENU resources, instructors, course material etc. and a strict control applied to each programme following a Quality Assurance System (QAS)

In order to obtain these goals several measures must be taken.

[2]Official Journal of the European Communities, 9.6.2001; C 166/38 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/elearning/doc_en.html

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Organization

Organization of the network to master the challenges of the strategy has been proposed in the following manner.

Organisational entities

a) ENU should have a **Board** with members at institutional level to ensure the anchoring of ENU in each partner institution, to have access to recourses in the institution and to bring political power to ENU.

b) A **Board Working Group** should be appoint as a sub-group among the Board members, consisting of people who are specialists in one or more tasks related to the operation of a virtual university.

c) The **ENU Secretariat** could be hosted by one of the legal institutions, or the services could be bought externally, for the daily operation of ENU. The size of the secretariat will depend on the finances of ENU, but should be kept at a minimum.

d) An **Administrative Group** will work on overcoming differences between administrative systems and practice in the institutions. There could also be an **Academic Group**, taking care of quality assurance, and development of new curricula, a **Research Team** to work on questions related to the use of ICT in education.

Agreement and services

An agreement between the institutions collaborating in ENU must be established and signed, stating the role of the ENU both as a virtual and as a physical organisation. An example of such an agreement is found attached to the organisational plan for ENU.

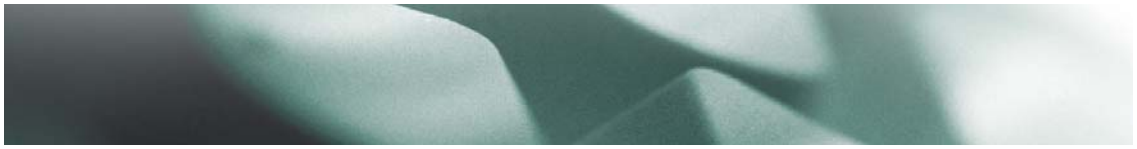
Offering distance e-learning courses need both a pedagogical and a technical platform. ENU will not enforce particular pedagogical approaches or a common learning management system (LMS). ENU consists of several institutions with different traditions in teaching and e-learning. Still there needs to be plans and provisions for services to the public, the users, internal services, technical services, and measures for security.

Committees or task groups may be set up for particular purposes like pedagogical methods, marketing of ENU programmes, business strategies, and in particular a forum for information and discussions about e-learning standards (e-learning environments, LMS, learning units etc.) (More details in the full description of the model.)

Quality of studies

Students and society demand educational systems of high quality - the students because they spend time and money for the education, and the society because educational quality is the best insurance for future welfare. Reasons for implementing a comprehensive quality assurance system (QAS) stems from the competition with a growing number of institutions offering courses through the internet, and that institutions all over Europe are urged to offer joint study programmes. A QAS that can be applied and accepted across all partner institutions is of particular importance. This must define parameters and assessment methods for several factors, like administrative systems, study programmes, courses, staff qualifications, student

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assessment and qualifications. More details on this in the full model report and in the quality assurance system report (WP2b).

Plans and development of study programmes and courses

In order for collaboration between institutions to take place, it was necessary to develop a joint approach to the description of programmes and courses in order to have a common working language, before designing the template. An explanation of the key terms used, are as follows:

- *A study programme* consists of a number of *courses*, and awards a formal qualification or degree
- A *course* can be part of more than one *programme*, and is awarding credits
- A *course* is made up of a number of *modules* or *study blocks*
- A *module* or a *study block* can be part of more than one course.
- A *module* or a *study block* consists of a number of *learning objects*
- A *learning* object can be used within more than one *module* or *study block*

The *mENU* project adapted the structure from the first two levels as a starting point for designing the demonstrator, testing some courses of two different study programmes.

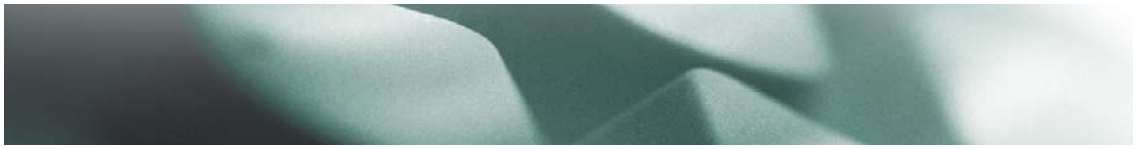
ECTS-NL

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is appropriate for the creation of transparency of the study programmes, for "building bridges" between institutions and widening the choices available to students. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognise learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measurements - credits and grades - and it also provides means to interpret national systems of higher education. But it needs adaptation in order to accommodate procedures related to the net based learning (NL) nature of study programmes.

A modular approach to construction of courses, applying the ECTS-NL, enhances flexibility, cooperation and sustainability of dynamic study programmes. Clear advantages here can be stated as follows:

- *Standardisation:* Those designing a course or a module know in advance the exact amount of workload the total course shall have, and are guided in implementing it with a set of learning objects
- *Flexibility:* It is very easy to develop interchangeable courses and modules that can be assembled, disassembled and re-used easily
- *Distributed development of courses and modules:* More than one institution can collaborate for the design, development and delivery of a study programme, a course or even a module
- *Adaptability:* a course or a module can be localised to diverse student populations or special target groups

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Economy

ENU is a consortium administrated at the location of one of the ENU partners. Even if the experiences of models with rotating administration have not usually been very encouraging, this seems to be a realistic first step.

Funding

The financing sources for the ENU work consist basically of the following sources:

- Annual remunerations, i.e. annual fees paid for the participation in the ENU network; may be paid as service fees between the HEIs etc.
- Membership fees on an annual basis
- Public subsidies from governments, EU projects, national / regional projects etc.
- Revenues from brokerage and fees, generated income, partially channelled back to the partners for their courses and services
- Other income, e.g. specific infrastructure project funds

One of the motives for joining the ENU is t to offer courses for a larger market, and perhaps make more revenues.

Costs / expenditure

This will consist of e.g. board costs, board working group costs, the ENU secretariat which includes

- personnel costs; leader, study administrator, technical support etc.
- office costs
- operational costs

Further on there will be development costs, where each institution is responsible for its own courses. Each institution must therefore cover these costs.

Concluding remarks

In the mENU project there has been developed a lot of tools to construct an ENU. To some extent the tools have been used to create a demonstrator i.e. master programmes and courses. The programmes are still running with students from around the World and with courses delivered by several institutions. The testing is thus at an early stage.

The maturity within the institutions, regarding the use of ICT in education, implementation of ECTS and the willingness to create courses to be used over the internet, varies considerably. There is still a way to go.

Nevertheless, in the process of *designing tomorrow's education* and to *foster the European dimension*, we believe that *virtual European universities, based on partnership and cooperation with other universities* represent a possible way to move forward. This short description outlines some of the main principles for a loose network model to create an ENU. More details and background for the suggestions can be found in the full report. We hope that the work of the mENU team will be of benefit to the community and to institutions that embark on the development of a collaborative, virtual university.

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