



e-Quality Project

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UNIVERSITY
OF TAMPERE

Best Practices Database

WP3 – D3.3

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Introduction

The -Quality project aims to analyze and facilitate the implementation of quality in Open and Distance Learning for Higher Education. The Best Practices Database was created for the collection and sharing of experiences and knowledge between the actors in the field of ODL. The best practices come from the everyday experience of the actors concerning the ways to do things, which improve the quality of ODL. The contents of database are created and modified by the users.

The best practices can as be considered as guidelines for planning, organizing and implementing ODL. Database may help the actors as source of information when solving encountered problems or finding good tips on how to develop and enhance the quality of ODL.

1. Scope of the document

In this document the structure and functionalities of the database are described. First part of the document introduces the user interface. Interface is used for both entering and querying data.

In second part of the document database structure and technical information is described.

Project concentrated on creating and developing of the database with user interface for searching and adding data into the database. Database administration interface was not created. Interface was designed to resemble the e-Quality –project website. Colours, links and icons were chosen to match previously created website

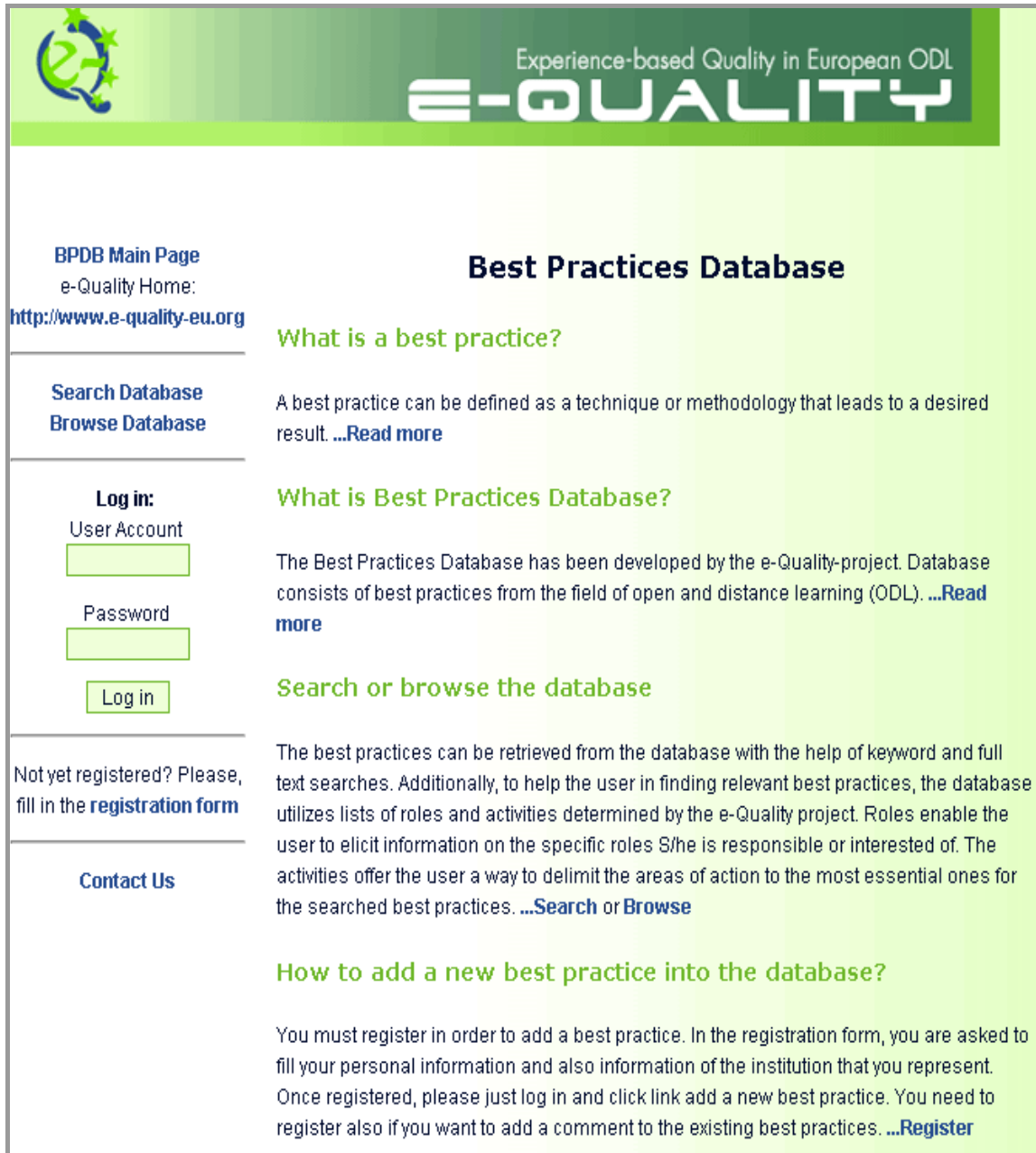
Version history is presented in document control.

2. How to use the Best Practices Database

The user interface of the database is divided into two entities with two different functions, information retrieval and data input. These two interfaces are separated by registration. Without registration user can search and browse database, but if user wants to add new best practices or comment the existing ones, registration is required.

In the main page the concept of best practices and main functions of the database are introduced. From the left column user can choose links either to information retrieval or to registration, and after that to adding information. Main page has also link to e-Quality –project website, and information about the contacts and privacy policy.

Interface was designed to resemble the e-Quality –project website. Colours, links and icons were chosen to match previously created website



The screenshot shows the 'Best Practices Database' page. At the top, there is a green header with the 'E-QUALITY' logo and the text 'Experience-based Quality in European ODL'. Below the header, the page is divided into several sections:

- Navigation:** Links for 'BPDB Main Page', 'e-Quality Home: http://www.e-quality.eu.org', 'Search Database', and 'Browse Database'.
- Log in:** A section with 'User Account' and 'Password' input fields, and a 'Log in' button.
- Registration:** A section titled 'Not yet registered? Please, fill in the registration form'.
- Contact Us:** A link for 'Contact Us'.
- Content:**
 - What is a best practice?** A best practice can be defined as a technique or methodology that leads to a desired result. [...Read more](#)
 - What is Best Practices Database?** The Best Practices Database has been developed by the e-Quality-project. Database consists of best practices from the field of open and distance learning (ODL). [...Read more](#)
 - Search or browse the database** The best practices can be retrieved from the database with the help of keyword and full text searches. Additionally, to help the user in finding relevant best practices, the database utilizes lists of roles and activities determined by the e-Quality project. Roles enable the user to elicit information on the specific roles s/he is responsible or interested of. The activities offer the user a way to delimit the areas of action to the most essential ones for the searched best practices. [...Search](#) or [Browse](#)
 - How to add a new best practice into the database?** You must register in order to add a best practice. In the registration form, you are asked to fill your personal information and also information of the institution that you represent. Once registered, please just log in and click link add a new best practice. You need to register also if you want to add a comment to the existing best practices. [...Register](#)

2.1 Information retrieval –searching and browsing the database

Searching or browsing the database does not require registration. From the search database-link user can from the database with the help of keyword and full text searches. By clicking the Question mark –button after each option

[BPDB Main Page](#)
 e-Quality Home:
<http://www.e-quality.eu.org>

[Search Database](#)
[Browse Database](#)

2.2 Searching best practises from the database

The database utilizes lists of roles and activities determined by the e-Quality project. Roles and activities enable the user to elicit information on the specific roles and activities s/he is responsible or interested of.



- *Search by a role:* Every best practice in database is connected to a role and activity. User can search best practices according to roles they are related to. The roles are listed under two sub processes: "Student Support" and "Learning Material Design and Production".

Search by a role ?

Sub process: Student support

Role

- Teacher (7 occurrences)
- Tutor (4 occurrences)
- Coordinator (0 occurrences)
- Administrative support (0 occurrences)
- Technical support (2 occurrences)

Sub process: Learning material design and production

Role

- Learning material designer (0 occurrences)
- Learning material producer (0 occurrences)
- Audiovisual planner (0 occurrences)
- Usability planner (0 occurrences)



- *Search by an activity:* User can search best practices by activities. The activities are listed under the roles responsible for these activities.

Search by an activity ?

Role: Teacher

Activities

- Pedagogical planning (2 occurrences)
- Familiarization (2 occurrences)
- Guidance in subject matters (0 occurrences)
- Leading the learning process (0 occurrences)
- Feedback and evaluation (3 occurrences)

Role: Tutor

Activities

- Motivation (2 occurrences)
- Guidance (0 occurrences)
- Encouragement to interaction and collaborative work (3 occurrences)

The number of occurrences in brackets (e.g. 5 occurrences) after each role or activity tells how many best practices is to be found by choosing that checkbox. If the number is zero (0 occurrences) there shall be no search results with that checkbox choice.

- *Search by content of the best practices:* User can search the database with the words or with the exact phrase.

Search by content of the best practices ?

Search with the words:

Search with the exact phrase:

To make your search more efficient, see [help](#) or open a separate help-window by clicking the question mark.

Search result:

As a search result database shows related best practices in brief. Title, keywords, short description and date when best practice was added into database is shown. From the View full details –link user can see the whole description.



Best Practices Database - Search Results

Following 2 best practices were found:

Informing students about special characteristics of e-Learning

Keywords: Information, familiarization, e-learning

The students should be informed about the special characteristics of e-Learning. What kind of challenges may occur? What is typical for interaction in virtual learning environment? What are ...

Added to the database at: 2006-08-25 13:04:37

[View full details](#) of the best practice

Students' familiarization with the use of the Learning environment

2.3 Browsing the best practices in the database

User can browse the database by the titles of the best practices ordered alphabetically. Title, keywords, short description and date when Best practice was added to database is shown directly, and full description can be seen by clicking the View full details –link.

Browse Database

Browse the database by the titles of the best practices ordered alphabetically:

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

C

Chat -tool for quick conversations

Keywords: interaction, motivation

Chat is very useful tool in on-line courses. Chat is tool for synchronous interaction, so discussions takes less time than in discussion forums or with e-mail. Chat is useful for quick discu...

Added to the database at: 2006-08-24 13:47:14

[View full details](#) of the best practice.

[Up](#)

3. Adding new best practises into the database

3.1 Registration

In order to add information to database user has to register to database. Link to registration form can be found from the main page. Registration form includes personal information, like name and contact information, and information related to institution user belongs to. User is asked to create the user account and password, which he/she can use when logging in to the database. The data is protected according to the privacy policy of the University of Tampere, Finland. The information about the privacy policy is available for users.



Registration Form

Registration is required in order to add best practice into the database, or commenting them. Searching the database doesn't require registration.

Required information is marked with *

Add your personal information, please:

* User account (4 - 8 characters):

* Password (4 - 8 characters):

* First name:

* Family name:

* Occupation:

* Email:

Phone:

Fax:

Address:

Add information of the institution you belong to:

* Institution name:

Acronym:

* Country:

URL:

* Language:

Save

Cancel



3.2 Adding the best practices

[BPDB Main Page](#)
e-Quality Home:
<http://www.e-quality.eu.org>

[Search Database](#)
[Browse Database](#)

You have logged in as **suvi**

[Log out](#)

[Add New Best Practice](#)

[Check Best Practices](#)

[Check Personal
Information](#)

[Contact Us](#)

After registration user can log in to database by user account. After login, three more options appear in left column: Add new best practice, check best practice and check personal information.

- *Add new best practice*: Registered user can add new best practices into database. User is asked to add only the best practices that are related to Open and Distance Learning at the level of Higher Education. User is asked to describe the best practice and identify in which role and activity it is related to. These are obligatory fields. User has also possibility to add additional information to optional information fields. User can choose if his/her e-mail address is shown with the information concerning the best practice for the registered users of the database



Add New Best Practice

The aim of this database is to collect information concerning the best practices in Open and Distance Learning at the level of Higher Education. Please add only best practices which are suitable for this purpose.

If you need more information to fill in the fields, see [help](#) or open a separate help-window by clicking the question mark.

Required information is marked with *

* Best practice description

* Best practice title:

* Keywords: ?

* Description of the best practice: ?

* Roles and activities ?

Sub process: Student support

Role

Activities

Teacher



Pedagogical planning

Familiarization

Guidance in subject matters

Leading the learning process

Feedback and evaluation

Tutor



Motivation

Guidance

Encouragement to interaction and collaborative work



Optional fields

Which quality indicators were in use? 

What is/was the validation method? 

What is the history and background of the best practice?



- *Check best practices:* User can check, update and delete best practices he/she has added to database.
- *Check personal information:* User has possibility to update personal information given in registration form.

3.3 Adding the comment

Best practises are not stable or fixed forever methods, solutions or arrangements. The reason for this is as well the changes in higher education institutions as the development of information technology used in ODL. This is why the best practise database also gives room for the commentary of the practices by the users of the database. In this way, the e-Quality -project gives space for the evolution of the best practises in the face of novelties in the field of higher education and ODL.

Registration is required also in order to comment the best practices. After login, Add a comment to this best practice –link appears after each best practice.

Add a Comment

Fill in your comment, please:

Best practice to which you're making a comment:

Never too much information

Sub process: Student support
Role: Teacher
Activities:
- Pedagogical planning

Keywords: Information, notices

Description: Remember to inform students about changes in schedule, structure or in your own timetable. Never just disappear from the learning environment. Obscurity and uncertainty diminishes students' motivation and cause frustration. There is never too much information.

Added to the database at: 2006-08-25 12:48:58

By Suvi Junes **from** The University of Tampere

4. The Best Practices Database description

The best practices database implementation uses MySQL relational database. The interface is written in HTML and PHP. The interface will list the matching best practices fitting the user's query and the related sub processes' best practice data titles or the upper level best practices' titles (if the found match is itself a sub process) as links. The presentation of the data will be text-based. The e-LUP editor tool of the e-Quality project may be used to draw graphical presentations (e.g. flowcharts) of larger processes consisting of multiple tasks involving their own best practice sub processes saved to the database. The database structure is designed to be flexible so that the technical solution doesn't limit its



usage to only the two sub processes (student support and resource production) even though the project is mainly focusing on them.

4.1 The table structure of the database

The following is an introduction to each table entities and their attributes. More detailed description of the table entities is in appendix 1. The entity relationship diagram is presented in appendix 2.

4.1.1 Table 'bestpractices'

Table 'bestpractices' contains the descriptions of best practices. In the user interface this information is filled in add new best practice -form.

bp_id	Primary key of the table.
p_id	Foreign key to the table persons.
valid	Has the default value 1, which means that the best practice is to be retrieved from the database e. g. in search results. Value 0 means that the best practice is "deleted" (e.g. it's not current any longer).
meta_date	Current timestamp generated by the database. Timestamp is generated when a best practice is added to the database. Timestamp changes, when the best practice is updated.
title	The title of the best practice.
keywords	Words or topics that describe the best practice.
features	The description of the best practice.
quality_indicators	The name of the quality approach or description of the indicators that have been used. The quality indicators can be also quality models or standards.
meta_validation	Description of how the best practice has proven to be the best way to do things in certain situation (e.g. what methods were used to verify the success).
descr_startdate	Description of the history and background of the best practice.
descr_duration	Description of the use of the best practice (e.g. is the best practice still in regular use etc.).
descr_participants	Description of the participants which were involved with the planning and implementation of the best practice (e.g. units inside institution, partners outside the institution, networks, companies etc.).

descr_completion_rates

This field is remain of earlier plans and not used now. If not used in future, the field may be dropped.

descr_supplementar_costs

Description of the costs needed in the constant use of practice (e.g. time, money, workload, etc.).

descr_calculusmodalities

Description of how the costs were calculated.

training_level

Description of the training level in which the best practice has been implemented (e.g. introductory studies, basic studies, subject studies, intermediate studies, advanced studies etc.)

resources Description of resources related to the best practice (e.g. books, webpages etc.).

email_permission

Has the default value 0, which means that the email of the registered user is not to be published. When adding a best practice to the database a registered user can choose the checkbox saying "My e-mail address can be shown with the information concerning this best practice for the registered users of this database." By choosing this checkbox user allows her or his email address to be printed with other information of the best practice.

4.1.2 Table 'processes'

Table 'processes' contains the id-numbers of the sub processes, roles and activities which are saved by the registered user as checkbox choices. In the user interface this information is chosen in add new best practice -form (below the title Roles and activities).

process_id	Primary key of the table.
bp_id	Foreign key to the table bestpractices.
role_id	Foreign key to the table roles.
activity_id	Foreign key to the table activities.

4.1.3 Table 'described_processes'

Table described_processes contains the descriptions of the sub processes which are made by the registered user. In the user interface this information is filled in add new best practice -form (below the title Roles and activities).

descr_process_id



	Primary key of the table.
bp_id	Foreign key to the table bestpractices.
descr_process	Name of the self-described sub process.
descr_role	Description of the role related to the self-described sub process.
descr_activity1 to descr_activity5	Descriptions of the activities related to the self-described role.

4.1.4 Table 'comments'

Table 'comments' contains the comments which are added to the best practices. In the user interface comments are filled in add a comment -form.

c_id	Primary key of the table.
p_id	Foreign key to the table persons.
bp_id	Foreign key to the table bestpractices.
comment_date	Current timestamp generated by the database. Timestamp is generated when a comment is added to the database.
comment	The comment of the best practice.

4.1.5 Table 'persons'

Table persons contains the information of the registered user. In the user interface these fields are filled in the registration-form.

p_id	Primary key of the table.
first_name	User's first name.
last_name	User's last (e.g. family) name.
occupation	User's occupation.
email	User's email address.
phone	User's phone number.
fax	User's fax number.
address	User's address.

user_account

An account which identifies the user.

password User's password, which is in encrypted form.

4.1.6 Table 'institution'

Table institution contains the information of the institution to which the user belongs to. In the user interface these fields are filled in the registration-form.

i_id	Primary key of the table.
p_id	Foreign key to the table persons.
name	Name of the institution (e.g. University of Tampere).
acronym	Institution's acronym (e.g. UTA).
country	Country where the institution is located.
url	Address of institution's home page.
language	The main language used in the institution ?

The following tables are created for the user interface and to ensure reliable search results.

4.1.7 Table 'sub_processes'

sub_id	Primary key of the table.
sub_process	Name of the sub process.
ordered	This field can be used in retrieval to fetch names in certain order. If the order is meaningless this field may be dropped.
valid	Has the default value 1, which means that the sub process in question is to be retrieved from the database into add new best practice and search-forms.

4.1.8 Table 'roles'

role_id	Primary key of the table.
sub_id	Foreign key to the table sub_processes.
role	Name of the role.
ordered	This field can be used in retrieval to fetch names in certain order. If the order is meaningless this field may be dropped.



valid Has the default value 1, which means that the role in question is to be retrieved from the database into add new best practice and search-forms.

4.1.9 Table 'activities'

activity_id Primary key of the table.

role_id Foreign key to the table roles.

activity Name of the activity.

valid Has the default value 1, which means that the role in question is to be retrieved from the database into add new best practice and search-forms.

Tables eqpartners and eqwebtexts are remain of earlier plans, and not currently in use in the Best Practice Database website.

ANNEX A.

Tables in equality-database.

Tables_in_equality	
activities	
bestpractices	
comments	
described_processes	
eqpartners	not in use
eqwebtexts	not in use
institution	
persons	
processes	
roles	
sub_processes	

Table bestpractices

bp_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL
auto_increment				
title	varchar(255)	YES	MUL	NULL
keywords	text	YES		NULL
features	text	YES		NULL
quality_indicators	text	YES		NULL
p_id	int(8)		MUL	0
meta_date	timestamp	YES		
CURRENT_TIMESTAMP				
meta_validation	text	YES		NULL
descr_startdate	text	YES		NULL
descr_duration	text	YES		NULL
descr_participants	text	YES		NULL
descr_completion_rates	text	YES		NULL
descr_supplementar_costs	text	YES		NULL



descr_calculusmodalities	text	YES		NULL
training_level	text	YES		NULL
resources	text	YES		NULL
valid	int(2)			1
email_permission	int(2)			0

Table comments

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
c_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	
auto_increment					
bp_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
p_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
comment	text	YES		NULL	
comment_date	timestamp	YES		CURRENT_TIMESTAMP	

Table described_processes

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
descr_process_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	
auto_increment					
bp_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
descr_process	varchar(255)	YES	MUL	NULL	
descr_role	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
descr_activity1	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
descr_activity2	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
descr_activity3	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
descr_activity4	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	



descr_activity5	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
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Table processes

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
process_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
bp_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
role_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
activity_id	int(8)		MUL	0	

Table persons

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
p_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
first_name	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
last_name	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
occupation	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
email	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
phone	varchar(20)	YES		NULL	
fax	varchar(20)	YES		NULL	
address	text	YES		NULL	
user_account	varchar(8)				
password	varchar(50)				

Table institution

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
i_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
name	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	
acronym	varchar(7)	YES		NULL	
country	varchar(100)	YES		NULL	
url	varchar(255)	YES		NULL	



language	varchar(100)	YES		NULL	
p_id	int(8)		MUL	0	

Table sub_processes

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
sub_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
sub_process	varchar(255)				
ordered	int(2)	YES		NULL	
valid	int(2)			1	

Table roles

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
role_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
role	varchar(255)				
ordered	int(2)	YES		NULL	
valid	int(2)			1	
sub_id	int(8)		MUL	0	

Table activities

Field	Type	Null	Key	Default	Extra
activity_id	int(8)		PRI	NULL	auto_increment
role_id	int(8)		MUL	0	
activity	varchar(255)				
valid	int(2)			1	