

Deliverable D3.2 IQA regulation & criteria for digital TLA

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Session 4 Monitoring, Evidence Collection and Continuous Improvement

- Course evaluation, course analysis and student involvement in QA
- Annual review and programme follow-up mechanisms
- Evidence-based monitoring and PDCA cycle
- Action plans for identified quality gaps

Output: Key evidence categories and monitoring elements for the self-assessment tool

1. Monitoring

Why is monitoring important in digital TLA?

Monitoring is a set of systematic processes, standards, and practices designed to maintain and enhance the quality of education by ensuring that institutions meet established benchmarks (ref 3). Within a digital context, it serves as a mechanism for accountability and transparency, requiring institutions to demonstrate their digital readiness and the reliability of their technological infrastructure. Effectively, monitoring provides the ongoing oversight necessary to guarantee that learners receive a valuable effective experience (ref 1.).

Therefore, monitoring in digital Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (TLA) is a critical component of internal quality assurance (QA) because it ensures the delivery of high-quality programs and services while maintaining established benchmarks. By providing ongoing oversight, monitoring guarantees that learners receive a valuable and effective educational experience that is transformative and prepares them for professional success (ref 3).

The importance of monitoring in digital environments can be categorized into several key strategic areas: Accountability and transparency; institutional readiness; “closing the loop” for continuous improvement; management effectiveness; strategic alignment; and, equity and inclusion.

Firstly, monitoring serves as a primary mechanism for demonstrating institutional accountability to stakeholders, including students, parents, employers, and accrediting bodies. It provides these groups with confidence in the institution’s commitment to excellence (ref 3).

Secondly, in the specific context of digital transformation, monitoring requires institutions to provide evidence of their digital readiness and the reliability of their technological infrastructure. This ensures that the virtual learning environment is stable, accessible, and fit for its pedagogical purpose (ref 3).

Thirdly, monitoring is the process that allows institutions to gather the evidence necessary for data-driven decision-making. This creates a feedback loop where information from course evaluation and student performance is used to identify quality gaps and implement binding action plans for enhancement (ref 2; ref 3).

Furthermore, monitoring is not only about pedagogy but also about assessing and improving university management. Because the quality of core activities like teaching is dependent on effective management, monitoring acts as a crucial lever for overall institutional quality. Also it ensures that digital teaching practices remain aligned with the institution’s broader strategic planning and mission. This includes maintaining supportive environments for learners and developing clear digital learning pathways that meet evolving workforce demands (ref 2; ref 3).

Finally, systematic monitoring allows institutions to track and ensure digital equity, verifying that educational materials are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities or those in remote locations (ref 3).

2. Evidence Collection and Continuous Improvement

However, for monitoring to be effective, it is necessary to use a systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a factual basis for institutional decision-making, which is called “evidence collection”. This process aims to “close the loop” between the generation of data, such as enrollment rates, student satisfaction surveys, and learning analytics, and its practical application for improvement (ref 1, p.93). By gathering evidence across key areas like governance, curriculum design, and assessment integrity, institutions can transition from subjective impressions to a robust, data-driven evaluation for their digital TLA.

Nevertheless, evidence-based monitoring only provides value when it leads to continuous improvement. This is a process-oriented mindset focused on regularly assessing and enhancing institutional systems to achieve better outcomes. This phase is operationalized through the PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act), which serves as a methodology for closing the loop.

3. Course Evaluation

Before explaining the PDCA cycle it is paramount to look at the course evaluation and the annual review. Firstly it is needed to define what is being measured (the course and the student experience) and who is involved. In a digital environment, course evaluation must move beyond simple satisfaction and focus on learner-centered design. Hence, a high-quality digital course requires an explicit and visible alignment between the intended learning outcomes, the digital activities, and the assessment methods (ref 1; ref 2).

Furthermore, the evaluation should check if the course uses digital pedagogy designed for the medium, rather than just adapting face-to-face materials. What is more, a critical part of evaluation is ensuring that exams and assessments are fair, transparent, and have robust authentication and integrity mechanisms to prevent misconduct in digital settings. Also, it is paramount to ensure that the volume of work is fair and clearly communicated (ref 1, p 12).

On the other hand, it is necessary to look at course analysis, which is the process of reflecting on the data collected during the course to identify areas for growth. The use of digital activity logs and data (like student progression and completion rates) can help to identify learning gaps and guide pedagogical interventions. However, this analysis should not be a static report but an evidence-based dialogue that informs future program and course reviews. The analysis includes looking at grade distributions and student outcomes to determine if the course is meeting its original educational goals (ref 1, ref 2).

Finally, the student experience must be “the guiding lens” for all digital QA. Student involvement includes looking at if students participate through satisfaction questionnaires regarding digital tools and tutoring, as well as through interviews with external agencies. Also, quality is measured by how easily students can access online tutoring, digital libraries, and technical support when they encounter obstacles. Hence, institutions must track student engagement and well-being, ensuring that the digital environment reduces isolation and remains accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities (ref 1, p.40).

4. Annual review and programme follow-up mechanisms

Annual review is also needed in order to follow the PCDA cycle. Meanwhile course evaluation provides the raw data; the annual review is the formal process for institutional oversight of that data. This annual review is how we satisfy the European Standard and Guideline (ESG) 1.9, ensuring that digital courses undergo continuous improvement cycles to remain relevant and effective. Annual reviews are the primary mechanism for “closing the loop” between the generation of data and its actual use. While course evaluation looks at individual subjects, the annual review looks at the entire academic programme to identify systematic trends (ref 3).

Therefore, the review should involve internal and external stakeholders to generate suggestions for necessary programme changes. Also, beyond student satisfaction, these reviews must analyze data on student progression, completion rates, and labor market entry.

A robust system typically has a yearly “check-up” of all courses and programmes to catch and remedy deficiencies quickly and a more in-depth review (typically every six years) that includes self-evaluation and peer review by external specialists to ensure the programme remains aligned with international standards. Finally, the results of these written reports must be disseminated to the university hierarchy to ensure proper resource allocation for improvements (ref 1, p.21).

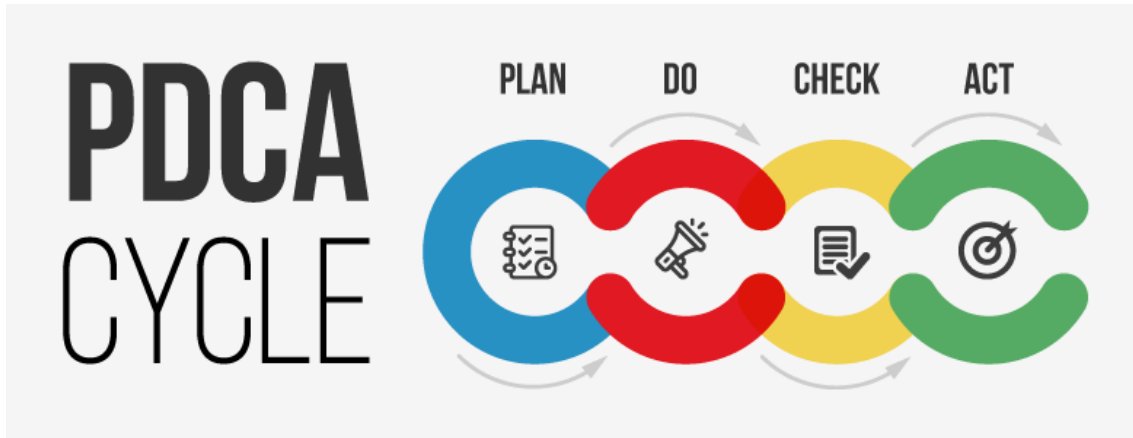
Hence, the annual review highlights deficiencies, identifies development needs, and establishes short and long-term measures for improvement. Also, it ensures that programs maintain the conditions required for accreditation and are implemented according to their verified reports.

5. Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle

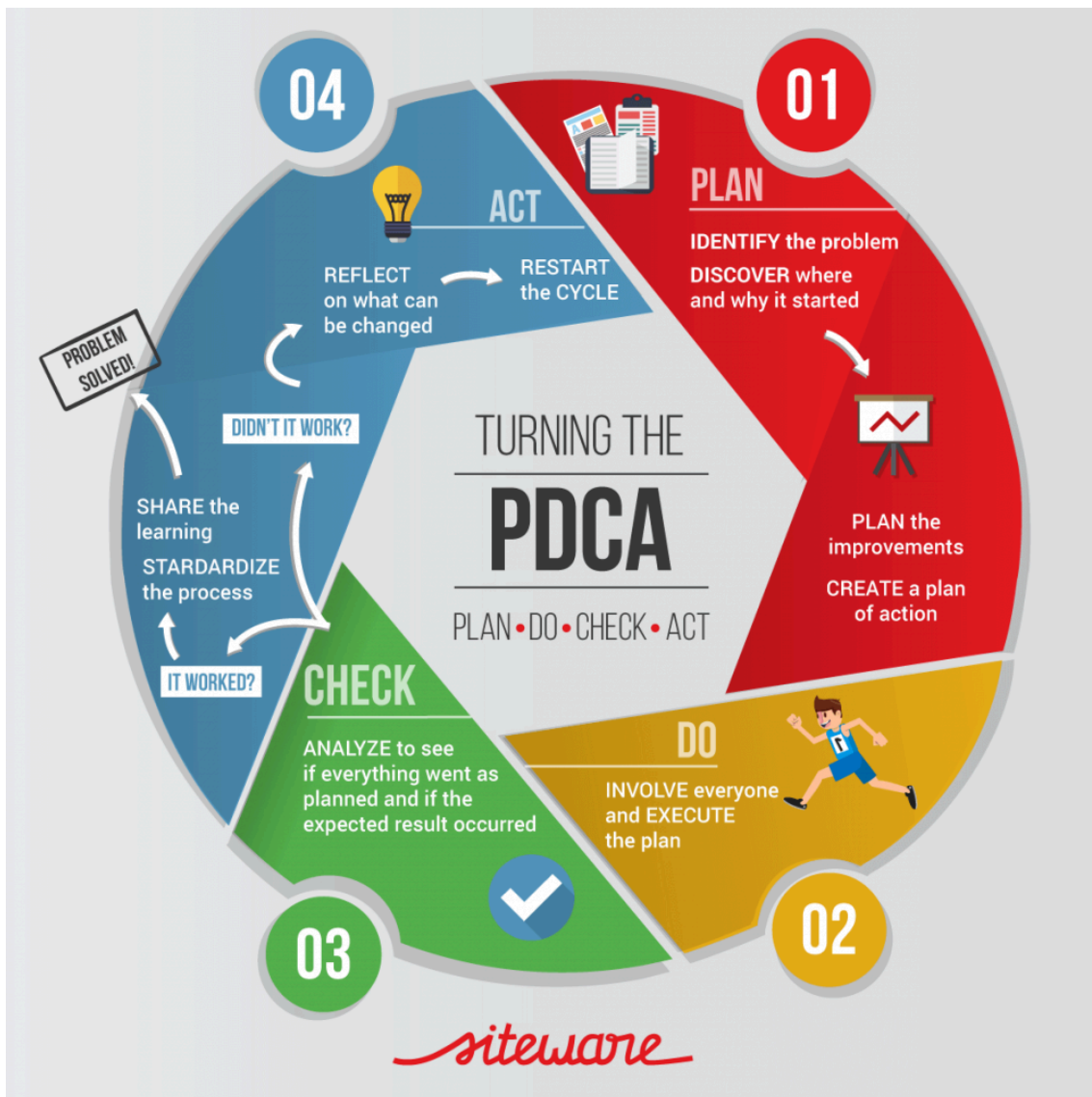
The PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) is the methodological anchor for continuous improvement within the QA framework for digital TLA. Its primary purpose is to ensure that quality is not a static administrative burden but a dynamic, data-driven process that “closes the loop” between evidence collection and institutional decision-making (ref 1).

The cycle is structured into four distinct phases:

- Plan: Identify the problem or area for improvement, set objectives, and define the action plan with the necessary resources.
- Do: Implement the plan on a small scale to test its effectiveness and collect data while it is running.
- Check: Analyze the data obtained during the "Do" phase and compare it with the initial objectives to determine if the change had the expected effect.
- Act: Standardize the solution if the results were positive to apply it on a larger scale, or adjust the plan and restart the cycle if it did not work.



Action plans for identified quality gaps (see below).



When monitoring identifies a significant “quality gap” such as a student satisfaction score falling below a set benchmark it triggers a formal Action Plan that serves as the “Act” phase, containing binding reflections and specific changes to be introduced for the next course offering.

6. Action Plan

An action plan is a formal, binding document designed to address and remedy specific “quality gaps” or weaknesses identified during the monitoring and evaluation of a course or academic program (ref 1; ref 2; ref 3). Unlike a standard course analysis, which is primarily a reflective exercise, an action plan is used when a course requires specific development that goes beyond normal maintenance.

An action plan can be initiated in two primary ways (ref 1, p.29):

- Automatic Triggers: in advanced digital QA systems a plan is automatically initiated if student satisfaction scores fall below a specific threshold, such as an average value below 3.0 out of 5.0
- Staff Initiative: it can be requested by a course coordinator, examiner, Programme Director or Head of Department due to “red flags” like a sudden drop in student success rates, a need for subject renewal, or long-term low throughput.

Furthermore, a robust action plan typically contains a summary of what worked well and what failed, based on sources like the course evaluation board, student feedback, and learning analytics. Also, contains a concise list of specific adjustments such as new pedagogical methods, updated materials, or revised assessment strategies, to be introduced for the next course offering and an identification of the funds, staff time, or professional development needed to implement the changes (ref 1, p.30).

Hence, firstly the action plan is triggered by low scores or a leadership request. Then the Course Coordinator drafts the plan, consulting with colleagues and student representatives to ensure the proposed solutions are realistic. Later, the Programme Director reviews the plan to verify that the proposed actions are sufficient and feasible to let the Head of Department officially decide if the plan will be implemented. This is a critical step because the Head is responsible for allocating the necessary funds or staff to make the improvements happen. Finally, the measures must be implemented before the course is offered again, and leadership verifies that the gap has been addressed.

7. Key evidence categories and monitoring elements that serves the foundation for the institutional self-assessment tool

The self-assessment tool is the mechanism that allows an institution to “close the loop”. By systematically gathering this evidence, analyzing the gaps, and initiating the action plans they move to genuine continuous improvement. It is important to know that the self-assessment tool is structured around ten core criteria, which are digital interpretations of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 1.1 through 1.10, that represent the specific areas where the institutions must collect evidence (ref 1, p.19):

- Governance and QA Strategy (ESG 1.1): documented digital education policies, clear allocation of roles (e.g., Deans, IT, QA Office), and student representation in digital oversight bodies.
- Curriculum and digital course design (ESG 1.2): standards for LMS structure, evidence of purpose-built digital pedagogy, and a formal approval process for new digital courses.
- Digital Teaching, Learning, and Interaction (ESG 1.3): guidelines for instructor presence (response times, facilitation) and structured student collaboration mechanisms.
- Faculty development and support (ESG 1.5): records of mandatory foundational training and available instructional design and media production services.
- Student assessment and academic integrity (ESG 1.4): policies for secure authentication, proctoring, and plagiarism detection, as well as strategies to maintain integrity in AI-rich environments.
- Student support and digital services (ESG 1.6): evidence of technical, academic, and psychological support specifically adapted for remote learners.
- Technology, infrastructure, and reliability (ESG 1.6): evaluation processes for educational technologies and monitoring logs for LMS reliability and usability.
- Data privacy, protection, and security (ESG 1.1 & 1.7): formal data protection policies, documented informed consent procedures, and regular cybersecurity audits.
- Ethics and digital equity (ESG 1.7): frameworks for learning analytics and strategies to address digital divides, such as access to reliable internet and devices.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement (ESG 1.9): historical records of regular feedback collection from students and staff, and evidence of closed loop improvement cycles.

Furthermore, to ensure a balanced evaluation, the self-assessment tool requires a mix of two types of indicators to provide a complete picture of institutional quality. Firstly the quantitative indicators that provide the “hard facts”. It includes student enrollment, progression and completion rates, graduate employability, and average satisfaction scores from digital course surveys. Secondly, the qualitative evidence that provides the “pedagogical context”. It includes student reflections, peer review of digital materials, and evidence of faculty participation in professional development (ref 3).

Finally, when institutions use the self-assessment tool, they should be prepared to provide “artefacts” such as curriculum maps, LMS samples, policy documents or training records, as proof of quality for the external review following the ESG 1.10.

References

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