

QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN

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Achieving wider uptake of water-smart solutions

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D7.1 – Public

Quality Assurance Plan

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ABSTRACT

Deliverable 7.1 "Quality Assurance Plan" was developed by SINTEF within Task 7.1 - Project management and quality assurance, led by SINTEF, from WP7 - Collaboration, communication and management. This deliverable aims at ensuring that the project will satisfy the relevant quality standards. The plan defines suitable quality and includes mechanisms to review the internal management and quality progress reports, as well as the overall project deliverables. It also describes the management procedures and tools adopted for measuring and monitoring the project progress.

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LEAD BENEFICIARY

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1 Introduction

In WIDER UPTAKE, project quality activities are covered by WP 7. These activities ensure an efficient execution of the project with good control of progress and quality of work and deliverables.

Monitoring the project progress and quality assessment activities are managed by the Project Management Team (PMT) together with the Quality Assurance Manager (QAM) and involve the following main procedures (as described in the Description of action (DoA), section 3.2.1):

- Verification of work progress
- Organize the peer review of project deliverables
- Preparation of project progress report

Therefore, the structure of D7.1- Quality Assurance Plan is here organized in the following sections:

- Quality assessment tools
- Project progress reports
- Conclusions

This document together with deliverables D7.2 (Data Management Plan), D7.3 (Risk Management plan) and D7.4 (Communication plan) establishes a framework for the PMT to effectively carrying out all management activities and monitor the project for current and future risks and avoid negative effects, and (ii) being a handbook for every member of the project consortium to conduct their contractual project activities with a high-quality level.

2 Quality assessment tools

2.1 Verification of work progress

The PMT and the QAM are responsible for the project quality management so to ensure that the project activities necessary to design, plan and implement WIDER UPTAKE are effective and efficient with respect to the purpose of the objectives and its performance.

The main responsibility of the PMT is to ensure that the scientific and technical activities of the project are accomplished successfully. While the QAM will oversee the application of QA standards to deliverables and, if needed, call on other internal or external experts (e.g. from other related H2020 projects).

The PMT will have monthly meetings (usually as online conferences) to discuss progress within and across the WPs and the need for any corrective measures. The PMT will discuss arising issues in more detail than can be done by the Project Steering Board (PSB), e.g. down to the task level. They will discuss and propose solutions in case of:

- Foreseeable difficulties in a WP to achieve objectives or deliverables
- Need for harmonisation of activities between and across WPs
- Obstacles and barriers causing delays in progress, in particular if this is likely to affect subsequent project activities or results.
- Need for reallocation of tasks within or among the WPs, if needed
- Weak performance or malfunctioning of a partner

The PMT decides whether an issue can be tackled internally or has to be communicated to and decided by the Project Steering Board (PSB) or the EC. In the latter cases, the PMT will develop a proposal to be communicated to the PSB for decision.

To ensure a regular monitoring of the project's tasks, WP leaders are asked to report on the progress of their WP monthly in the PMT meeting. For this purpose, WP leaders should collect the views of the task leaders and try to present information regarding:

- Expected on-going activities;
- Short overview of the activities undertaken during that month period;
- Issues/delays with the activities. In case there are issues, the WP leader should also identify other tasks that can be impacted, and specify a plan to minimise the risks of delay or other negative consequences.

If there is a serious issue, SINTEF, as Coordinator, will set up an additional virtual meeting with the WP leader and the task leader to develop a plan to minimise the impact of that issue.

In case of conflict and dispute among the team members, the conflict resolution will follow the procedure described in the DoA, Section 2.2 and further elaborated in the Consortium Agreement (CA).

To facilitate the project progress monitoring, the WIDER UPTAKE Team, using MS Teams, was created and granted access to the consortium. This tool provides information and standard templates for internal communication on deliverables and milestones status.

Within the team site, the PMT has a dedicated channel for communication. In the file area of Task 7.2 PMT, there is a spreadsheet database that contains the MoMs of the PMT meetings with decisions by the PMT and an overview of deliverables and milestones. The database also holds the official list of project participants.

2.2 Peer review of deliverables

2.2.1 Deliverable adequacy

1. Deliverables should be conceived according to the objectives and the target audience.
2. The following three key questions should be determined by the responsible for each deliverable:
 - What is the purpose of the deliverable?
 - Who is the target audience?
 - What is the best way to convey the information?

2.2.2 The Short-Deliverable Policy

Very long deliverables create several problems:

- It takes long to write them,
- Their revision requires long time, and results in more comments that require further revisions,
- They are not readable and prone to lose the focus.

Therefore, we must design deliverables from the beginning to be clear about the objective, and then be very concise about which content to include in the documents. The focus must be clear and concise. Avoid repeating content from other documents (always use references for that) and synthesize, summarize and get to the point always.

It is of utmost importance to have a clear Executive Summary, an Introduction section outlining clearly the Purpose and Scope, a Conclusions and a Future Work section.

The right size for a given deliverable depends largely on the topic, the objective, etc., a preferable maximum size of 30 pages for dissemination/exploitation documents and 100 pages for technical deliverables, could be considered as reference size. However, there might be exceptions and it will be the responsibility of the reviewer to indicate whether the report is too large for the purpose (and the work included).

2.2.3 Quality Assurance

All (PU and CO) deliverables of WIDER UPTAKE must undergo a Quality Assurance (QA) procedure, as follows:

1. The lead author/main person responsible for the deliverable, the deliverable leader, is responsible for the arrangements, initiation and logistics for the QA process and its supervision (contacting reviewers, deadlines, etc.) under the WP leader's supervision.
2. Reviewers should be selected when the deliverable preparation starts (see following section on Quality Assurance Schedule).
3. Reviewers' comments and contributions should be done as described in the following section "Methods to be used by reviewers".
4. Reviewers' comments should be addressed before the deliverable can be considered final. Thus, the author(s) of the deliverable should send the reviewed/revised document to the reviewers for a final acceptance of the document.
5. With the approval of the reviewers, the final document will be submitted to the QAM and the Coordinator for the final check and the delivery of the Deliverable to the EC services. The QAM at SINTEF

will check the application of QA standards to the deliverable and the coordination team (SINTEF) will perform a last round of proof-reading.

6. Two reviewers should review each deliverable (Type R = Reports) as following:
 - a. Reviewer 1 should be from the lead organisation for this deliverable. If this is not possible, another partner also enrolled in the same Work Package should be used. If this is not possible, another project partner must be chosen, even if not participating in the WP.
 - b. Reviewer 2 should be a partner acquainted with the Work Package, but not from the lead organisation for this deliverable. If this is not possible, another project partner should be chosen and if this is not possible then an external reviewer should be identified (e.g. a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) member may be approached through the Coordinator).
 - c. Reviewers shall not be authors or co-authors of the deliverable to be reviewed.

Note: all deliverables of different types (P = Prototype, DEM = Demonstration, DEC = Decision, OTHER), should be accompanied by a report to be reviewed as for the rules here defined for deliverable of type R.

Deliverables classified as Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services) (CO), should follow the same review process, but according to the specific sharing rules specified in the Grant Agreement (GA) and in the Data Management Plan (D7.2); these deliverables should be reviewed by partners having the right as contributor and/or reader of the specific deliverable.

The QAM is the ultimate quality reviewer, i.e. the QAM oversees the application of QA standards to deliverables against pre-defined quality standards, lay-out and structure and, if needed, calls in external experts.

The Coordinator is responsible for uploading the final version of the deliverable to the correct location in the project repository and into the European Commission platform. All deliverables must be approved by the Coordinator before being submitted to the EC. The Coordinator is the ultimate responsible for all deliverables towards the European Commission.

All deliverables that are reports must be produced using the WIDER UPTAKE/H2020 deliverables template, which is made available in the WIDER UPTAKE Teams site.

2.2.3.1 Quality Assurance Schedule

When the deliverable preparation starts, the deliverable leader should contact the WP7 leader (SINTEF) regarding deliverable target audience and content, select and contact reviewers for future revision of deliverable, and agree on a binding procedure for the review process with the two reviewers.

The deliverable leader will propose the schedule for the review process in advance, agree on it with the reviewers and share it with the corresponding WP leader, who will then share it with the Coordinator and the QAM.

The schedule proposed in Table 1 is recommended and deliverable leaders are encouraged to adhere to it. However, the timing of specific review stages can be adapted if previously agreed between the deliverable leader and the corresponding reviewers.

Table 1 Schedule for the review process of deliverables

Review Process Stage	Starts when	Duration	Roles involved
Contact WP7 (SINTEF)	Start of deliverable preparation	1 week	Deliverable Leader WP7 leader (SINTEF)
Select reviewers and agree on schedule	Start of deliverable preparation	1 week	Deliverable Leader Reviewers WP leader of the deliverable
Submit final draft to reviewers	6 weeks before submission date	3 weeks	Deliverable Leader Reviewers
Address reviewer comments and approval by reviewer	3 weeks before submission date	2 weeks	Deliverable Leader Reviewers
Quality Check	1 week before submission date	1 week	Deliverable Leader QAM Coordinator
Submission to European Commission	Deadline		Coordinator

It is the responsibility of the deliverable leader to make sure that the document is ready for starting the review process by the corresponding date and, therefore, to plan the previous writing phase accordingly. The deliverable leader should also take into consideration any internal rule regarding QA adopted by the contributing Parties, so to avoid delays.

2.2.3.2 Method to be used by reviewers

When working with Word documents, reviewers' comments and contributions should be done using the “Track Changes” mode combined with specific text comments aligned with the specific section. If the revision is based on a pdf document, the reviewer should use the possibility of adding notes to the text. All files under review should be stored at the relevant file area in the WIDER UPTAKE Team site to have version control and backup.

The reviewers are invited to give detailed and constructive comments (with references, whenever possible) that will help the authors to improve the deliverable. A guiding list of review criteria is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Suggestion of review criteria to be followed by reviewers

Questions
Are title, type and dissemination level in accordance with the definition in the “Description of Action” (part A chapter 1.3.2 table WT2)?
Is the scope and content of the deliverable in line with its definition in the “Description of Action” (part A chapter 1.3.3)?
If this is not the case, is there a justification for it and/or is a contingency plan presented?
Are the objectives of the report and its activities clearly stated?
Is the report consistent with its objectives?
Is the Executive summary sufficiently informative, especially when read as a stand-alone text?
Is the organization of the report satisfactory (e.g. introduction, objective, methods, results, conclusion, references)?
Is the report in accordance with the template (project branding, front page, second page, table of contents, table of figures, list of tables, fonts, headings, spacing, captions of figures and tables)?
If symbols or abbreviations are used in the report: is there a complete list of symbols and abbreviations?
Is the scientific / technical approach sound, adequate and state-of-the art?
Are interpretations and conclusions sound, justified by the data and consistent with the objectives?
Is the quantity of data presented adequate? Does the content justify the length?
Are the figures and tables all necessary?

Are the figures and tables complete (e.g., captions), clearly presented and of good quality?
Are the references cited relevant and up to date? Are all the cited references in the References List?
Is the report written in good syntax and grammar, and adequate language for the target group(s)?

2.2.3.3 *If a reviewer fails the agreed deadline*

In the case where, by unexpected reasons, the reviewer is not able to meet the deadline, the deliverable leader should be informed as soon as possible.

In exceptional cases, if the deliverable leader is not able to replace the reviewer in due time, then the leader should check whether the QA is guaranteed by one reviewer. If it is believed that this is not the case, then the leader should inform the PMT via the leader of the WP within which the deliverable is produced.

2.2.3.4 *Other issues*

The reviewers should take into consideration, when applicable, the issue of protection and management of IPR of the project results, making any suitable comments on this respect.

3 Project Progress Reports

Project progress reports will be prepared as a part of periodic reports that will be submitted to the Commission at M19, M37 and M50. The reports will follow the applicable EC template and contain all financial and technical information regarding the project progress, meetings, decisions made and issues which necessitates to be reported to the EC.

Project Progress Reports (PPRs) will have to be available at:

- M19 covering period M1-M18 to be reported to EC as periodic report by 30 November 2021,
- M37 covering period M19-M36 to be reported to EC as periodic report by 31 May 2023,
- M50 covering period M37-M48 to be reported to EC as periodic report by 30 June 2024.

In addition, intermediate internal reports will be prepared if and when deemed necessary by the PMT to supplement the monthly follow-up of activities.

SINTEF will provide the reporting tools

- PPR templates (WP status reports) for each WP which will include, besides the activity reporting and the assessment of WP progress towards objectives, information about efforts and cost spent in the reporting period.
- PPR tool for reporting of efforts (by person-month) and costs (by kEUR) by each WIDER UPTAKE partner.

Stages in the progress reporting:

1. Initiation and preparation of the project progress reports
 - The Coordinator will send a reminder to the WP leaders on the 1st day after the reporting period ends on provision of project status reports and the applicable deadlines.
 - WP leaders are responsible to collect scientific and technical information from the task leaders and the participating partners in the WP and assemble the report within the deadlines.
 - The Coordinator will send a reminder to partners on the same dates to update the PPR tool with used efforts (by person-months) and costs (by kEUR). The beneficiaries are obliged to follow the assigned deadlines for reporting of efforts and costs.
2. Reporting of the status to the PMT
 - The Coordinator will review the WP status reporting and follow up that all WPs have made the necessary reporting within the deadlines.
 - WP leaders will provide an overall report of the WP status, including efforts reported for relevant WPs in the PPR tool during the next PMT meeting. Be attentive that the reported progress (WP status reports) and reported efforts (PPR tool) are to be coherent.
 - The PMT will control the effort and cost consumptions in order to avoid severe deviations from the plan and propose mitigation actions when necessary.
3. Reporting of the status to the EC
 - The reporting to the EC will be based on the information collected in the two steps outlined above.
 - Periodic progress reports will be reported by the Coordinator to the EC at M19, M37 and M50 and follow the internal deadlines applicable for the project deliverables.
 - The PMT is responsible for the reporting of the scientific and technical activities of the project in a timely manner with the appropriate quality.
 - The Coordinator is responsible to submit the provided periodic progress reports in a timely manner.

4 Conclusions

This document with D7.2, D7.3 and D7.4 summarize all the procedures to ensure a successful collaborative work within the project and it describes the involved roles and tasks, the tools and instruments available, in order to conduct the work towards meeting the project objectives with the highest possible quality level.

The document aims at being a project execution handbook and a reference for all project consortium members for the entire project duration.

