



WP7
**Analysis of the Interagency Approach and Model
and its application in partner countries**

Executive Summary

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

NQA
Networking for Quality Assurance
PROJECT n° - 2012-1-IE1-LEO05-04714

Executive Summary

The application of the Networking for Quality Assurance (NQA) project in partner countries has been conducted at 3 levels; learner, local and national. This report outlines the main results and recommendations for each level.

Learners group:

Whether conducted with past or current students, learners at risk of exclusion or those who are job ready, this level shows very important findings for quality assurance. When the NQA project and its collaborative approach was presented to Learners it was important to highlight that learner participation in the project is a way of helping to improve training for others in the future. Learners received clear explanations regarding the project, our aims and objectives and the importance of their honest opinion. The project used open ended questions, ensured that all participants got an opportunity to contribute and ensured the students felt heard, understood and considered.

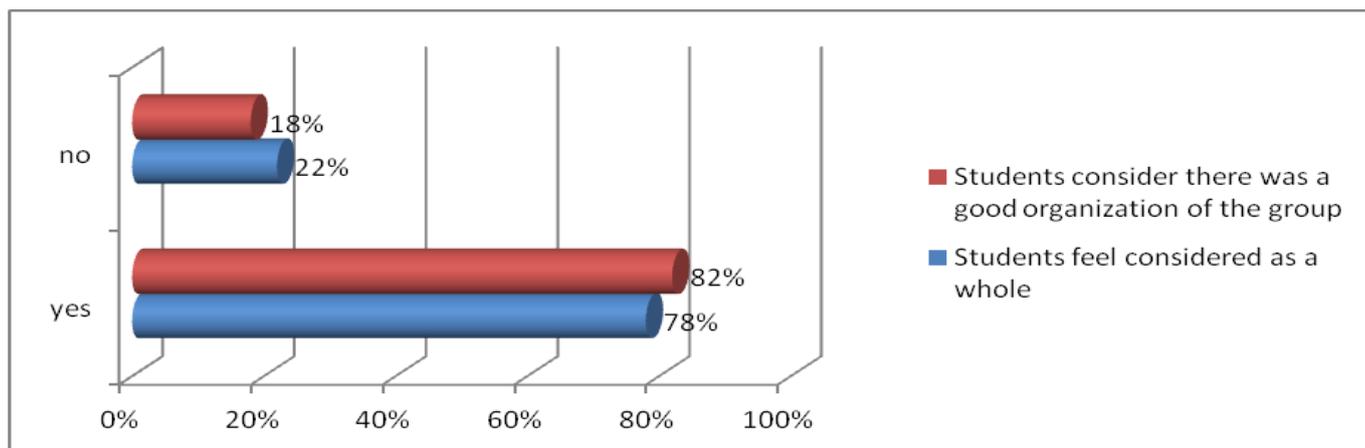
The following topics were discussed at this level:

- Do they understand the need to gather personal data?
- Do they feel their personal data are safe?
- Is interagency work a help for them?
- When do they experience quality?
- What are their experiences of quality to date?
- What are their expectations regarding education and training?
- Do they feel their expectations are met?
- Do they feel they have the better service?
- What makes a good or great training course as opposed to a poor training course?

Once Learners knew that their input could assist in improving the quality of training for others they were eager to contribute. Some figures gathered in relation to the implementation of learners groups in Spain, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland and Italy are as follows:

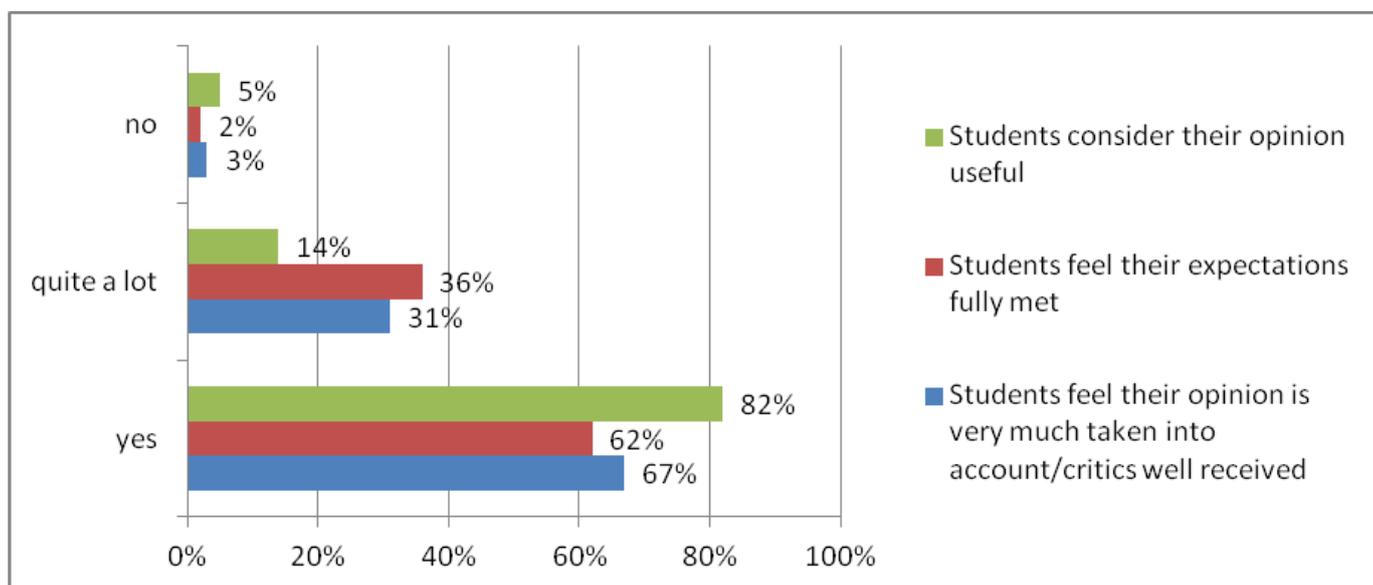
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82% of participants stated that the organization of the learners group was good ('we were given good information and supported to participate; we were involved in project design and we had access to a key persons' etc.) while 22% felt it was not good (saying for example, that maybe the information on the project was too much).

Twenty nine completed questionnaires were received from learners across the partnership.



As can be seen above, students believe in the usefulness of their opinion (82% consider it useful and 14% consider it as quite useful, while only a 5% think it is not useful). 67% consider also that their opinions are very much taken into account and criticisms are well received, 31% think their opinion is considered quite a lot and only 3% consider it not the case. Regarding their expectations when deciding to participate in the group, 62% feel their expectations were fully met and 36% partially met.

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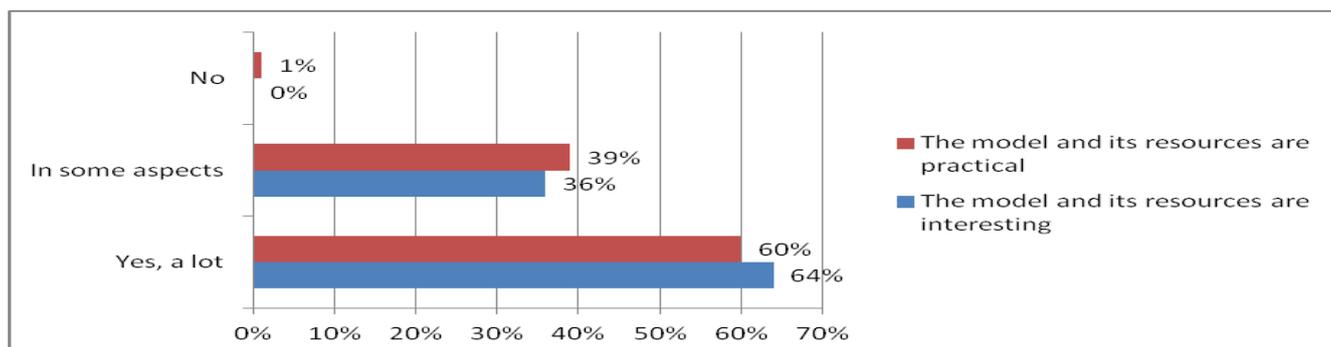
Local interagency group:

Different organizations can be engaged at this level as long as it's mainly related to their work (how QA will impact on day-by-day organisation). Developing interagency takes time and commitment, ensuring that all participating organizations needs are being met. It needs organising the agenda for discussion, a long term vision and short/medium term actions, and constant reviewing / evaluation of progress. Practical aspects like setting clear expectations, allocating time for guided reflection, promoting participation, doing practical sessions, sharing materials, using NQA products and keeping minutes have also to be considered.

The client or the learner is the focal point of the training activity, so he/she has to be at the very centre of the QA system. For this reason it is important to develop suitable tools for the self-evaluation of the learner.

The visibility of best practice is essential and strategic for QA development.

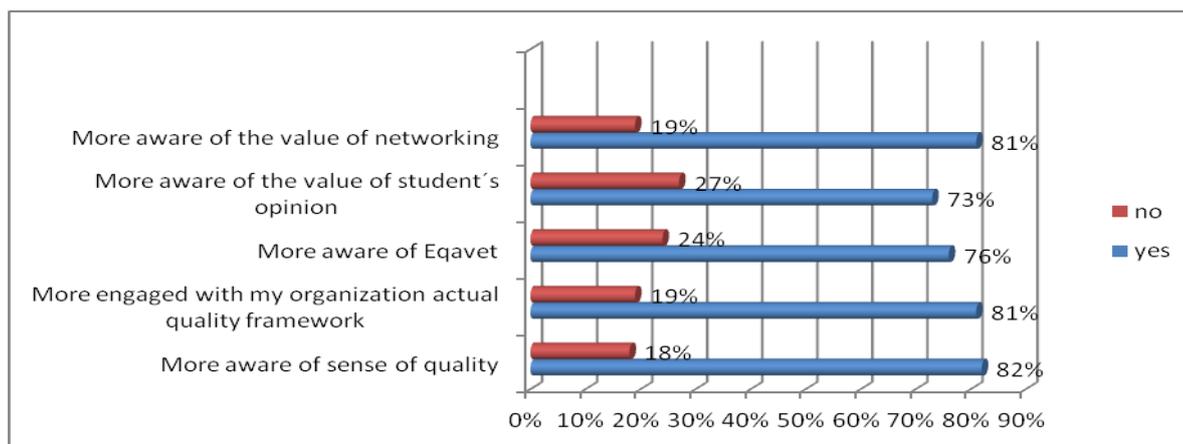
The interagency groups created in different partner countries have reflected on their development. In this sense, 96% consider that there is motivation and engagement within the group, 3% state they are building it and only 1% consider there isn't.



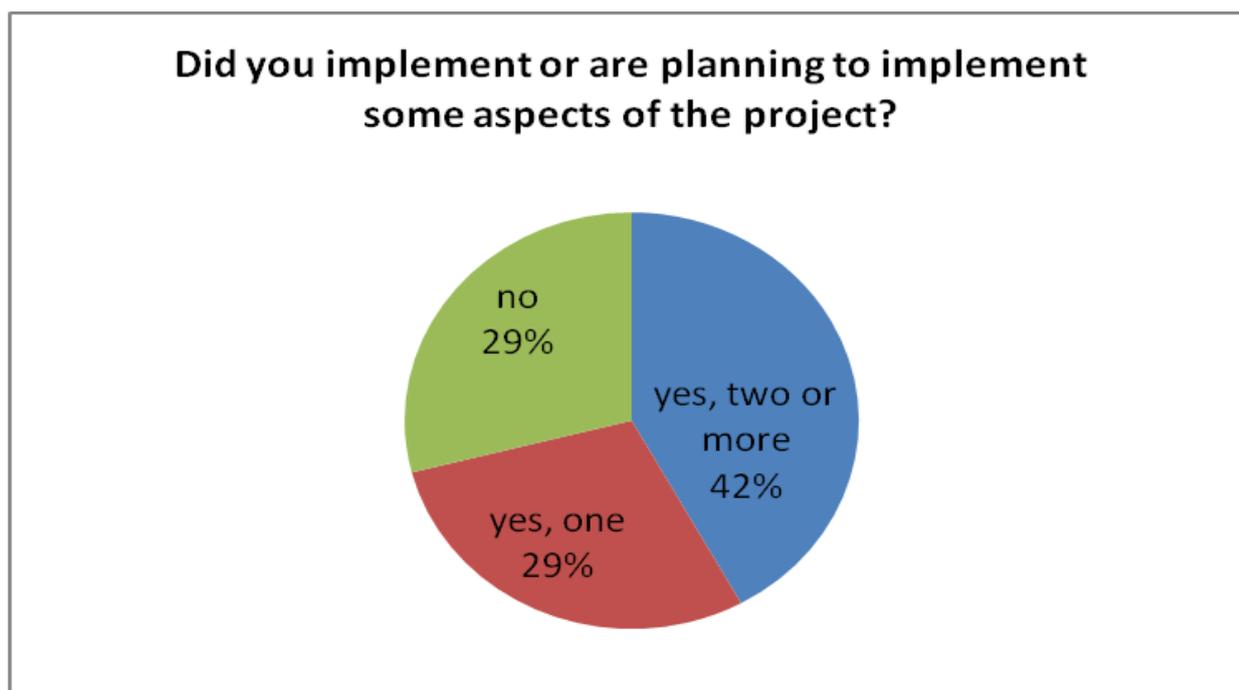
Participants consider the model and its resources as both interesting (64%) and practical (60%).

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The NQA model enables awareness of the value of networking (81%), the value of student's opinions (73%), awareness of EQAVET (76%), awareness of their organizations actual quality framework (81%) and in general an awareness of the sense of quality (82%).



Furthermore, 42% of the participants at this local level have already implemented or are planning to implement some aspects of the project, 29% have implemented one aspect and 29% have not implemented any aspects to date. Some of the comments regarding why they have not implemented aspects have to do with the fact that "it's too early" or "we're not ready for that stage, we're waiting on the final results". We must take into account that some questionnaires were answered 3 months before the end of the project.

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National interagency group: It's important to find the right level for the implementation of an interagency group at a national level in each country and find the right person to do so.

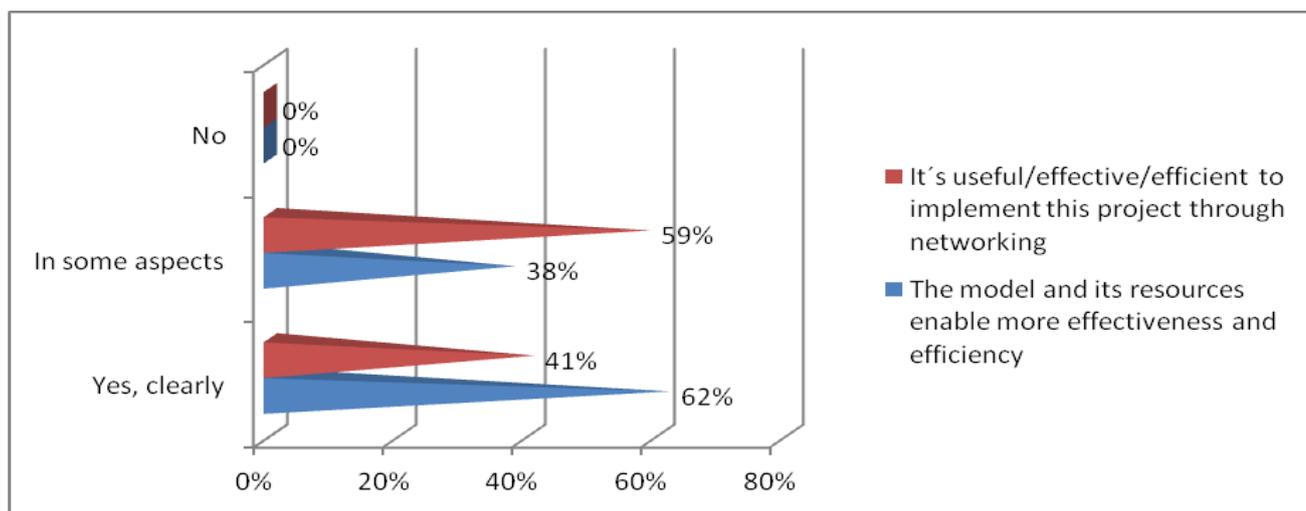
It is important to take care, within the Peer Review process, of the relationships and distance between co-operation, assessment and self-evaluation.

Some practical aspects to be considered are: being clear about the aims of the group and what impact/improvements are sought and how these will be recorded and shared; having a very clear agenda and keeping on time; communication is key; every participant has to know their role and responsibilities.

Implementation at this level in partner countries shows the following results:

The average number of completed questionnaires received in this group was 26.

The following considerations are gathered from the participants:



41% of the participants in this group think that it's useful, effective and efficient to implement the project through networking, 59% state that it is in some aspects. For 62% the model and its resources are clearly a way of enabling more effectiveness and efficiency.

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Recommendations and guidelines

Appropriateness of the transfer and effectiveness of the interagency approach

Net-Working for Quality Assurance aimed to bridge the gap between how VET providers and support organizations at local, regional and national levels implement QA tools developed at European level (e.g EQAVET, QALL). This was done by transferring a previous EQUAL project, EQUAL YOUTH, which focused on how organisations (including statutory services, NGOs, agencies, community & voluntary services etc.) when working better together can increase opportunities for disadvantaged young people to access the labour market.

Partners of the NQA project carefully analysed the processes, the ethos, the interagency tools and the key elements of the EQUAL YOUTH project and considered which aspects could be transferred to build interagency in the VET sector and subsequently meet the needs of local/regional/national/European stakeholders in the area of QA in VET.

After pilot implementation in partner countries of the elements to be transferred, we concluded that the model demonstrates the value of interagency working, while promoting a commitment to quality assurance at various stakeholder levels.

At national level, the analysis of the experiences in Spain, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland and Italy shows that participants of the different organizations involved considered that its execution through networking is useful, effective and efficient: 41% of the participants in this group thought that it is useful, effective and efficient to implement the project through networking and 59% stated that it is in some aspects. For 62% the model and its resources are clearly a way of enabling more effectiveness and efficiency.

Taking into account implementation at local level, we can also state that there has been an increased commitment to QA within all stakeholders involved. The organizations also gained awareness of different cultural aspects and the value of networking (81%), the value of student's opinion (73%), further knowledge of the EQAVET model (76%), their organizations actual quality framework (81%) and, in general, of the sense of quality (82%).

Further more, organisations at local levels either have already or are planning to implement some aspects of the NQA project: 42% of the participants at local level have already implemented or are planning to implement some aspects of the project, 29% are planning to implement one aspect and the 29% do not plan to implement in the immediate future.

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Usefulness of the model and it's resource pack:

Answers to the questionnaires show that participants at local level consider both the model and its resources interesting (64% agree).

The model and its tools are also considered practical (60% agree).

Nevertheless some new proposals on how to improve the model were gathered:

- It must be noted that quality work cannot depend on a specific individuals but that engagement must be at the organizational level so that it remains alive with new workers.
- Working groups usually don't tackle specific cases, having only a general coordination or information exchange, it is important to go further.

General Approach to Quality:

- Quality is all, not just the training and the trainers, but all the staff, the premises, etc. Evaluations should consider separately professionals and infrastructures.
- Quality in networking is related to having a comprehensive approach, focus on shared problems and avoiding overlapping.
- There should be an evaluation, not only of the work in each organization but of the interagency work and its usefulness in achieving its objectives.
- The importance of taking into account students opinions was highlighted.

EQAVET:

- Indicators such as completion rates should be considered but take into account the prevalence of vulnerable groups.
- Completion rates might depend on trainer's conditions (e.g. bonus linked to objectives).
- Information on placement rates of past students is not always easy to have once they have left the VET organizations. At the same time it's very important information for the design of future training courses.
- The investment in teacher training is not enough; we should look at how they apply new methodologies learnt into their practice.
- Indicators in relation to the environment (e.g. organizations in the network) should be added.

Participants in the organizations involved at local levels across partner countries agreed that the model and its resource pack enable more effectiveness and efficiency in the process of networking for quality.

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Lessons learnt:

The learner level provides very important findings for quality assurance. Encouraging collaboration in the project is important as it enables a sense of ownership and highlights that getting involved is a way of helping improve VET for the future.

It is important to involve or, at least contact employers (in the local area, but, if possible also at national level) so as to assist in improving employment opportunities for learners (stage, CV presentation, etc.); another strategic stakeholder is the university system.

One interesting possibility when organizing learner groups is to include both former and current students as it allows organizations to learn from their past practices and from new ways of working. Considering the opinions of former students (even those who drop off from the trainings) allows for comparisons between the training/organization they were in with others, their success in getting into the labour market, etc. It is also possible to bring together different groups of learners (e.g learners with many barriers, job ready learners...) and conduct similar focus group type sessions with each group.

In order to motivate participation, learners must be provided with clear explanations regarding the purpose of the meetings and the importance of their honest opinion before being asked if they want to participate. Their availability to attend meetings must be checked before setting dates. An important aspect to be considered during the meetings is the use of open questions, ensuring that there is only one voice at any one time, making students feel heard, understood and considered.

A short presentation can be used to outline: the project, the aims and objectives, and the focus of the learner input. Once Learners know that their input could assist in improving the quality of training for others they are generally eager to contribute.

The discussion in the learner groups needs to be organized in order to have a maximum benefit of the learner's opinions. The following topics can be discussed at this level:

Do learners understand the need to gather personal data? Do they feel their personal data are safe? Is interagency work a help to them? When do they experience quality? What are their experiences of quality to date? What are their expectations regarding education and training? Do they feel their expectations met? Do they feel they have the better service? What makes a good or great training course as opposed to a poor training course?

An opportunity could be provided to meet with providers and the national level so as to voice student's opinions - a policy/practice circle could enable this.

One of the partners commented that the questionnaire used to gather the learners' opinions on the performance of the learner groups was a little complicated to complete; it should be tested first with new participants so that it is well understood and that the right questions are made.

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At Local level: the involvement of different organizations is mainly related to the sphere of their work (how QA will impact on day-by-day organisation). There may be a need to overcome the disillusionment of people working in a never-changing system. In this sense it can be helpful to take into account students perceptions.

It must be ensured the clarity of purpose and role underpins the entire process. Participants at this level note that “a recognition that there are human and practical resources required to implement” this model.

Special care of the stakeholder relationships is required. It should be considered that developing interagency takes time and commitment, it needs organising the discussion, careful facilitation, strong leadership, ensuring that all participating organizations needs are being met, some identifiable champions who will advocate on behalf of the interagency group, a long term vision and short/medium term actions and constant reviewing / evaluation of progress. Practical aspects like setting clear expectations, allocating time for guided reflection, promoting participation, doing practical sessions, sharing materials, closing products and keeping minutes have also to be considered.

The learner is the focal point of the VET activity and so it has to be at the very centre of the QA system. In this way, it would be important to develop suitable tools for the self-evaluation of the learners.

The visibility of the best practices is strategic for a QA development.

For national level: It is important to find the right level for implementation in each case, which might not be national or even regional. It needs to be the one that makes most sense (e.g. VET programmes might depend on different autonomous regions and not established at a national level) and finding the right person to get to the right level is essential.

Bringing together a group of different organizations (public bodies, government departments, non-profits, semi-state agencies, etc.) on a number of occasions during the project may not be the best strategy for a national engagement. Instead organizations can be approached individually and relationships developed on that basis.

It is important to take care, within the Peer Review process of the relationship and distance between co-operation, assessment and self-evaluation.

Some practical aspects to be considered when organizing this type of groups are:

The coordinator has to ensure that he/she is clear about the aims of the group and what impact/improvements are sought and how these will be recorded and shared.

Having a very clear agenda and keeping on time (as participants are usually very busy). Efficient and effective communication is key (it's important to find ways to avoid multiple emails).

Every participant has to know their role and responsibility.

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