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ALL Accreditation of Lifelong Learning External Evaluation Report

**For the Leonardo da Vinci Community Vocational Training Action
Programme**

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1. Introduction

In this report the results from the external evaluation of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme ALL – Accreditation of Lifelong Learning will be introduced. Five partners took part in the project: Iceland, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Norway. The main focus of the evaluation is on the implementation of the project and quality of the products. Furthermore, dissemination strategies and the overall impact of the project are discussed. The report is divided into five main parts: 1) Introduction to the ALL Project, where the project is described, its aims outlined, and project partners are presented; 2) Description of methods used in the evaluation process and focus of the evaluation; 3) Implementation of the project, describing specifically all products and their development; 4) Evaluation of the impact within each member country; and 5) Summary of the project process, products, and impact in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

1.1 Description of the ALL Project

The ALL project is a transnational project aimed at developing quality assurance of lifelong education for learners and providers in the non-formal educational sector. As the job market demands constant updating of skills and the acquisition of new knowledge, the demand for lifelong learning opportunities has risen greatly. Learners are increasingly aware of the importance of receiving training and education in accordance with their aims and expectations, and employers want to be able to evaluate future staff's qualifications and assess the benefits of sending their staff to additional training. The ideology of the project was therefore that a comprehensive system at European level was called for, providing accreditation and certification of non-formal education and training. Additionally, externally set quality standards and professionally trained evaluators would be able to support learning providers to improve the quality of their practice.

The partners in the project were Educate in Iceland (www.mennt.net), Enskuskolinn in Iceland (www.enskuskolinn.is), OCNWNY - Open College Network in West and North Yorkshire in the United Kingdom (www.wnyocn.org.uk), VOFO – The Norwegian Association for Adult Education in Norway (www.vofo.no), Lava Legato in the Netherlands (www.lava-group.com), and Cooperitiva Studio e Progetto

2 in Italy (www.studioprogetto.com). The ALL project set up a website in order to promote its activities and products (www.all-accreditation.com).

1.2 Overall Aims of the ALL Project

The main objectives of the ALL project were to establish an accreditation system for continuing education and lifelong learning outside the formal school system. The system was intended to be user-friendly and cost-effective and applicable for use in all European countries without much alteration. The pilot of the products was based on language learning, but the European Quality Mark was designed so that its products would suit other learning sectors as well.

Initially, the partners aimed at developing an evaluator handbook and a provider handbook, based on a comprehensive needs analysis, which all the partner countries would contribute to. Furthermore, a business plan was to be put forth, outlining the dissemination and valorisation of the products. Soon it became clear that formulating a business plan was beyond the scope of what the project members could accomplish in two years. The business plan was therefore cut out of the project plan. During the initial phase of the project, the partners decided to develop a tool for employers and learners in order to measure the effectiveness of training, believing this would be a useful supplement to the accreditation system.

1.3 Partners and participants

Five countries took part in the ALL project: Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK. Two organisations from Iceland were involved in the project, Educate Iceland and Enskuskólinn. Educate Iceland is a formal national cooperation forum between social partners, the educational sector, local authorities, and others interested in education and training. The main focus of the forum is to gather and disseminate information, to facilitate the transference of knowledge and competence on various issues, and to encourage multi-player cooperation in the field of vocational education and training in Iceland. Educate Iceland is currently composed of 70 partners, incorporating all parties in the field of VET in Iceland.

Enskuskólinn was founded in 1986 and is now the largest private English language school in Iceland. It offers general English conversation courses for adults, teenagers and children, as well as specialised courses, various Business English

courses, on-site courses for local companies, and private lessons. The school's main aim is to teach people of all ages and levels English as it is used today.

The Italian partner, Cooperativa Studio e Progetto 2, is a non-profit social cooperative in the field of services and social promotion. It is a partnership of local authorities, associations, voluntary services and regional, national and international organisations, promoting collaboration and active partnership to answer the need of a changing society. The cooperative's main aim is promoting communication and human resource management.

The Dutch partner, Lava Legato, is a non-profit organisation, aiming at stimulating international mobility in training and providing information and support for people interested in activities abroad. It also organises international projects that focus on developing cultural awareness and increasing employment opportunities.

The Norwegian partner, Voksenopplæringsforbundet (VOFO), is an association of 22 adult-learning associations and other voluntary non-governmental organisations in the adult-learning field. The purpose of VOFO is to guard the common interests of the associations and their participants vis-à-vis the government, the parliament and the Ministry of Church, Education, and Research, and to promote non-formal adult learning in general.

The English partner, Open College Network West and North Yorkshire (OCNWNKY), works as a one of 28 regional members of the National Open College Network, which is the UK's foremost provider of accreditation services for adult learning. It aims to widen participation and access to high quality and flexible education, training and learning, to promote social inclusion and to ensure that learner achievement is recognised, valued, and understood through a national framework of accreditation.

2. Methods

2.1 The evaluation

In the evaluation of the ALL project, emphasis was placed on the products and processes related to the products. Less stress was placed on partnership working and dissemination strategies. A number of methods were used to gather information for

the evaluation. Partners were asked to answer a questionnaire, containing open-ended and closed questions. Open-ended interviews were also conducted with the Icelandic partners, the project manager and headmistress of Enskuskólinn. Content analysis was used to extract information from the interviews. Furthermore, short, informal phone-interviews were taken with partners from most of the other participating countries.

As the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland was brought in as an evaluator at the very end of the project and did not get a chance to meet with partners from countries other than Iceland, the evaluation was more general than we would have liked.

2.1 Evaluation strategy

The evaluation can be divided into the following stages:

- 1) Results of the project were evaluated in relation to project aims originally set out. This was done by analysing the overall quality of the products, bearing in mind what project members had originally aimed at in their application to Leonardo da Vinci.
- 2) The implementation was evaluated by examining documents showing the development of the project and the research carried out in the initial phases and analysing participant's responses in interviews and from questionnaires sent to them.
- 3) An overall assessment of the project's impact in each participating country and the partners' contributions to the project. The information used in this part of the evaluation was mainly based on the answers gathered in the questionnaires and interviews with the project members.

3. Implementation

3.1 About the ALL Project Process

The preparation period of the project was extensive, covering approximately the first year of the project's lifetime. During this time the partners reached a mutual understanding of what aspects an accreditation system of this sort should cover, and how the product development should be carried out. Furthermore, each partner

conducted a needs analysis in their country, wherein stakeholders were consulted to identify primary needs and extract ideas about the necessary characteristics of a trans-European accreditation system for lifelong learning. The results of the needs analysis were then used to formalise the focus of the accreditation system.

All in all, six meetings were held during the project; two were held in Iceland and one in each of the other participating countries. During the project phase, tasks that had initially been allocated to certain partners were transferred to others. The English partner agreed to take on a greater part of the responsibilities, whereas the responsibilities of the Italian partner were reduced. Table 1 depicts the distribution of task responsibilities among partners and the level of partner activity in the development of each task. Halfway through the project a new Italian partner became involved, replacing his predecessor who left the Italian partner organisation. This resulted in a period of inactivity, during which the new partner was familiarising himself with the project. Furthermore, the English partner, NOCN, a national network organisation for 28 regional organisations, transferred project participation to one of its regional members, OCNWNY. This transition went smoothly and did not disrupt the workflow. Some other staff changes took place during the project, but none of them caused disruption in the workflow.

Table 1. Division of responsibilities among partners and level of activity in each task

	Needs Analysis		Criteria and Questionnaire		Self-Assessment Tool		Guidelines		Evaluator and Provider Handbook		System for appointment of Evaluators		ALL supplementary forms**		Execution of Trial Phase		Training Effectiveness Survey	
	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level	R*	Activity level
Educate	x	Very active	x	Very active				Very active										
Enskuskólinn		Active		Very active											x	Very active		
Lava Legato	x	Very active															x	Very active
OCNWNY	x	Very active		Active					x	Very active	x	Very active	x	Very active				
Studio e Progetto 2	x	Not active					x	Not active		Active								
VOFO	x	Very active			x	Very active												

*Indicates partner initially responsible for the task

**These include the Evaluator Application, the Evaluator Self-Assessment, the Evaluator Portfolio of Evidence, the Provider Application Form, and the Provider Appeals Process.

3.2 The Needs Analysis

In order to develop a successful product meeting existing needs in the market, an elaborate needs analysis is crucial in the process. In the beginning of the project, each country agreed to gather information from stakeholders, i.e., providers of non-formal education, social partners, employers, and individual learners. The Italian partner did not contribute to this part of the project, mainly because a change of staff was taking place at this time. Partners approached the task differently, but their conclusions were nonetheless remarkably alike.

The Icelandic partners consulted an advisory board, comprised of educational providers, employers, and representatives from regional lifelong learning centres in Iceland, trade unions and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Interestingly, all board members expressed the same needs. They all wanted a transparent quality assurance system, emphasising highly qualified instructors, suitable assessment methods in non-formal training, and a suitable working environment for the learners. Currently, there are no existing accreditation systems for non-formal education in Iceland, and the need for such a system is, thus, evident.

The English partner gathered extensive information for the needs analysis. Questionnaires were sent out to samples of statutory providers, small providers, and employers. Through these the English partner was able to identify what a quality assurance of this kind needs to include, and how it would benefit providers, learners, and employers. Among the things consulted stakeholders thought most important for an accreditation system to include were a qualified teaching staff, appropriate learning environment and high quality resources and materials.

The Dutch partner mainly consulted organisations, which provide accreditation of training or collect and disseminate information on lifelong learning. They also contacted the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and conducted interviews with a number of other for-profit and non-profit organisations. The main focus of the Dutch partners was somewhat different from that of other partners since emphasis was placed on the responsibilities within an accreditation system rather than the needs of stakeholders.

The Norwegian partner mainly consulted providers of non-formal and vocational training, but also a federation of industrial companies and VOX, the National Institute for Adult Learning. Providers, employers and learners were all interested in a common, transparent quality assurance system. However, the preferred

emphasis of these three stakeholders varied; providers were interested in acquiring common standards, while employers preferred to emphasise the assessment of learning outcomes. Finally, learners were mainly interested in ensuring that there was consistency between their learning aims and what they actually acquired.

In summary, consulted stakeholders in each of the participating countries expressed interest in the development of a user-friendly quality assurance system emphasising training outcomes. Where other quality assurance systems are operational, the demand is greatest for small training providers who do not use external accreditation for their learners.

3.3 ALL Handbooks

As originally planned, the ALL project produced two handbooks, the Evaluator Handbook and the Provider Handbook. As its name implies, the Evaluator Handbook is written especially for evaluators working for The European Quality Mark. The handbook outlines the processes and procedures involved in the evaluation of learning providers for the ALL Accreditation Quality Mark. Each step in the accreditation process is described, and information is given about the role and responsibility of the evaluator, as well as the processes involved in becoming an evaluator. Similarly, the Provider Handbook is intended to give providers relevant information about the principles of the system and the processes involved in the accreditation. The English partner was responsible for writing the handbooks, cooperating with the Italian partner on the Provider Handbook. Accompanying the handbooks are all the relevant forms that the learning provider and evaluator might need in the accreditation process, along with the ALL Initial Questionnaire, the ALL Self-Assessment Form for Providers, and general guidelines about the accreditation process and ideology of the system. Apart from writing and developing the handbooks, the English partner also developed the system supporting the appointment of evaluators and the provider appeals process. The guidelines, written by the Icelandic partner, feature general descriptions of the major tools included in the European Quality Mark, outlines the philosophy of the system, and puts it into context.

3.4 ALL Initial Questionnaire

When learning providers initially seek accreditation from the European Quality Mark, the first step is to fill out the ALL Initial Questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into four parts, each measuring the effectiveness of different aspects of the learning provider's organisation and training provisions. The four sections are "Organisation and Administration", "Learner Needs and Course Development", "Measuring the Achievement of Learning", and "Learning Organisation". For each question a criterion is put forth, stating the standard that providers must reach to attain accreditation. Learning organisations are asked to provide extensive information and supply the evaluator with supporting organisational evidence.

All the partners were somewhat involved in the development of the questionnaire and the criteria, as they were discussed extensively during project meetings. However, the Icelandic partners, Educate Iceland and Enskuskólinn, were responsible for formulating the basic questions and criteria. While developing the questionnaire, other similar accreditation systems were studied and compared with the specific aims of the European Quality Mark. In particular, the OCN Quality Assurance was consulted during the development process. The English partner was consulted extensively regarding the criteria and questionnaire as they had relevant experience in this field. Once formulated, Enskuskólinn was involved in a trial phase, where the criteria and questions were implemented. Enskuskólinn provided all necessary supplementary material asked for in the questionnaire and put quite a lot of work into revising internal processes in accordance with the criteria. After the trial phase Enskuskólinn proposed a few changes, some of which were incorporated into the system.

Although the development of the criteria was centred on language providers, the partners never lost sight of future transferability to other learning sectors. As a result of this, the criteria are quite general so as not to tailor the system exclusively to language providers and ease transferability to other types of learning. ALL project partners believe private non-formal learning providers share the need to verify the quality of the instruction, teaching material, organisation, and environment they offer, and that accrediting different types of learning can be done in much the same way. Based on information gathered in the needs analysis, the questionnaire was especially catered to the needs of small learning providers. This was done by limiting the questionnaire to the absolute core activities private learning providers engage in,

leaving out more specific details of the practice. For small learning providers to be able to apply for accreditation from the Quality Mark, the cost of applying must be minimised.

3.5 ALL Self-Assessment Form for Providers

Once learning providers have completed the initial questionnaire, they are asked to self-assess their practice and processes with support and counsel from an evaluator. The Self-Assessment Form, developed by the Norwegian partner, is based on the ALL criteria and is in quantitative format. The providers assess to what extent they meet the requirements of the criteria by choosing from a range of graded statements. Just as the questionnaire, the Self-Assessment Form is divided into four sections. Points from each section are summed up and compared to the ALL Score Chart. If this score reaches the minimum score required, providers are awarded the accreditation. If not, providers are offered the opportunity to work with the evaluator to improve processes not meeting the standards of the Quality Mark. In the future, providers will be able to complete the self-assessment on-line. To date, the ALL Score Chart has not been developed and, thus, the Self-Assessment Form is not yet ready for use. Developing the chart and formulating the minimum criteria needed in order to receive accreditation will prove an important task for project members in the future. Without it the self-assessment form is not usable.

3.6 Training Effectiveness Survey

The Training Effectiveness Survey is a tool designed to measure the effectiveness of learning for the learners and their employers. As of yet, it is available on-line in Dutch only. However, a paper draft version in English is already available. The tool allows companies to measure the content of a course taken by an employee in relation to expected outcomes. Both learners and employers have access to the tool. Learners can use it to identify learning areas and skills that they would benefit the most from in their work, while employers could use the tool to measure the long-term impact of staff training in relation to the training costs. The employer and employee are expected to agree upon goals the employee will try to reach by taking a specific course from a non-formal learning provider. Jointly, they should also decide upon measurable behavioural indicators and corresponding results following training. Thus, the tool should allow organisations to maintain records of staff training and assess

benefits related to training. The Training Effectiveness Survey was not part of the aims that ALL set forth in the initial Leonardo da Vinci application. At the initiative of the Dutch partners, the project partners decided to include the development of the Training Effectiveness Survey in the ALL project. The Dutch partners were solely responsible for the development and implementation of the tool. Seven Dutch companies tested and gave feedback on the web tool. On the basis of the feedback from these companies, some changes will be made to the tool in order to make it more effective and user friendly.

4. Impact within member countries

4.1 Impact in Iceland

Currently, there are no established accreditation systems for lifelong learning in Iceland. Stakeholders in Iceland agree that there is a need for such a system and have generally expressed genuine interest in the project. Most private learning providers in Iceland do not have sufficient resources to apply for accreditation from larger international systems such as ISO. According to Julie Ingham, who has run Enskuskólinn in Iceland since 1986, the need for learning providers to be able to verify the quality of their practice has increased greatly in recent years because of more competition on the market. Also, by working through externally set quality criteria, private learning providers are given an important tool to improve their practice and processes and make documents more accessible to learners. She feels that involvement in the ALL project has been extremely beneficial to the school, helping them to improve the quality of their practice and formalising internal processes more clearly. In the case of Enskuskólinn, this was especially so for measuring learning achievement. After working through this process, the school changed its approach to measuring achievement. Instead of measuring learners' ability only in the beginning and end of each course, the school now periodically assesses where students are in the learning process, and how they can move from one learning stage to the next. The school has also benefited a great deal from setting up more explicit quality control, e.g., developing work packages for new teachers.

The headmistress is quite happy with the project outcome and feels that the criteria and questionnaire cover all necessary and important aspects of a language provider's practice, and that because of their generality, the system should be suitable for other learning providers as well. Nonetheless, she emphasises the importance of a well-formulated business model, remarking that the system's success depends to a great degree on minimising its cost. When questioned about the partnership working, the headmistress said that taking part in the meetings and working with the other partners had been an extremely positive experience for her and the school, deepening her understanding of different aspects of quality in lifelong learning.

According to ALL Project Manager Arnbjörn Ólafsson from Educate Iceland, the ALL project has elicited a great deal of interest from stakeholders in Iceland. Educate formed an advisory board, consisting of representatives from the trade unions, Ministry of Education, employers, and educational providers which will continue to work on the formalisation of an accreditation system for lifelong learning in Iceland. Educate has been in collaboration with The Education and Training Service Centre (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins), which is currently involved in accrediting course content and curriculum in lifelong learning. Because of the lack of an accreditation system for non-formal providers, The Education and Training Centre has formulated preliminary criteria, based to some extent on the ALL criteria, in order to help learning providers improve their practice. However, according to the centre's manager, these criteria are only intended to bridge the gap until a formal accreditation system can take over.

When asked to comment on partnership working, the project manager described it as good although a lot of time went into reaching a unified idea of the project aims and framework from which to work. Because of different cultural backgrounds and different interests of the participating organisations in their home country, the partners had to put a lot of effort into discussions about regional and national differences. In the end, he felt the heavy emphasis on the preparatory phase paid off, enabling partners to work more efficiently on their parts of the project. He felt his organisation had certainly benefited from the experience and expertise of the other partners and was quite positive that the project had instigated a process that would eventually lead to active accreditation centres in Iceland and hopefully in other European countries as well.

4.2 Impact in the UK

In the UK there is a large body of quality assurance systems used in relation to non-formal training and education. Nonetheless, the English partners, Donna Prichard and Sara Connell from the Open College Network of West and North Yorkshire (OCNWNKY), have identified an existing need for an accreditation system aimed at small lifelong learning providers. OCNWNKY has extensive experience in the field of accreditation processes and has been using their own accreditation system for years.

Asked to describe in what way the ALL project had benefited OCNWNKY, the English partners said: “It has been a tremendous opportunity for us as practitioners to share good practice in a wider setting. It has developed our understanding of the needs of other countries, and it has given us access to other ways of working and other approaches to quality assurance.” They felt the objectives of the ALL project had been well achieved although the partners’ different backgrounds and cultures had disrupted effective flow of communications at first. In particular, language proved a certain barrier so that confident English speakers tended to dominate the proceedings. All the same, they thought partners had worked hard at developing good interpersonal links and ways of working. They were somewhat critical of the project management and said it had been very patchy; at times there had been little organisation or time given to prepare for meetings which, in turn, sometimes resulted in disorganised meetings.

When questioned about their views on the Provider Criteria on which the Quality Mark is based, the English partners said that in their opinion the criteria were very good, adding: “...they have now been developed to a stage where they need some in-depth testing with a wide variety of providers. They will then need to be evaluated to determine whether they support the purpose sufficiently, and whether the information they provide to both provider and the Central Authority is valid and useful over time.” In their opinion, the project has been very successful in creating a system possible to use without much alteration in different non-formal educational settings. According to them, the system has come from intensive discussions about regional and national differences and is also based on long-term experience in the UK working with providers in all contexts. One of the main reasons the system should be easily transferable is that the training package is based on a developmental model of engaging the organisation in its own learning about quality assurance of their learning, their systems, and their expectations. However, the Quality Mark could have

been enhanced by publishing the material in all European languages and by including more partners in the project. They also felt that the project would have benefited from meeting more often to examine engagement in the project and draw conclusions from this.

Although the English partners thought they had been successful in achieving their own tasks in the project, they were somewhat dissatisfied with the inactivity of project partners between the meetings and felt that “greater flow of information and greater development occurring on an ongoing basis would have improved the project”. Nonetheless, they were very satisfied with the products ALL produced and expressed excitement over the potential of the products.

4.3 Impact in Norway

In Norway there is quite a lot of interest in an accreditation system of lifelong learning, especially among learning providers. The Norwegian partner, Ellen Stavlund from The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (VOFO), has worked in close contact with non-formal learning providers during the project lifetime. When asked what the main aims of the ALL project were, her answer was short and concise: “To work out a system and tools for quality assurance of non-formal learning, aimed at providers”. She expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the project and believed project members had reached their goals by creating usable tools. Asked about her own responsibilities and tasks, she felt she had been successful in undertaking and achieving them, but regretted not having more time to test the tools and felt there was still a lot of work to be done.

When asked to comment on operation of the partnership during the project, the Norwegian partner replied: “The partners did a great job although the contact and cooperation between the meetings could have been better.” Ellen was quite happy with the project management and the work delivered but criticised project delays and remarked that the manager seemed to be juggling too many balls.

The Norwegian partner was also quite happy with the transferability of the system and was convinced that although a language school was used to test the system, it was universal and could be used in all kinds of educational organisations. Despite this, she expressed some concern over the reception of the system in Norway. Although providers, employers and learners are aware of the need for external quality assurance, providers in Norway are generally low-cost providers and are anxious

about expenses related to such a system. A big challenge would therefore be making the Quality Mark easy to use and keeping the cost down as much as possible.

Lastly the Norwegian partner was asked if the project had benefited her organisation in any way. To this she replied: “For my organisation and our members, it has been crucial to be a part of this project. Quality and the need for a quality system has become an important part of our thinking, and we are working hard in different ways to get the system implemented”.

4.4 Impact in Italy

As stated above, staff changes in the Italian partner organisation led to a period where they were inactive. The current Italian partner, Roberto Doneddu from Cooperativa Sociale Studio e Progetto 2, therefore did not participate in the project from the start. When asked about his views on the objectives of the accreditation system, the Italian partner said these were the production of common vision among the partners and the preparation of tools for the ALL accreditation system. He felt the objectives had been fairly well achieved and elaborated by explaining that it had taken some time to overcome initial difficulties in working at distance despite good levels of commitment among the partners. During the last phase of the project, he felt that partnership working had improved, and partners had started to work better together. He was also pleased with the project management, in his own words “maybe a bit too centred on our Icelandic partner, but extremely professional and efficient”.

Just as the other partners, the Italian partner was asked to express his views on the transferability of the system. In his opinion the project was fairly successful in creating a system possible to use without much alteration in different educational settings, but that further testing of the tools was necessary in order to provide evidence of efficiency. In particular, he felt that transferability could have been enhanced by testing the tools in different learning sectors and by involving a greater number of providers in different countries in the project. He seemed quite optimistic about future reception of the European Quality Mark and remarked that there seemed to be a good level of interest in the system.

In relation to his own responsibilities and tasks, the Italian partner felt he had only been partly successful in achieving them, saying “I would have liked to be much more successful in respecting internal deadlines and working at distance”. Finally, he said that participating in the project had enhanced the visibility of his organisation and

the monitoring of accreditation systems in Italy, adding that the ALL project had been a wonderful opportunity for individual and organisational learning.

4.5 Impact in the Netherlands

Two staff members participated in the ALL project on behalf of Lava Legato in the Netherlands, Jessie Voermans and Faouzi Chiabi. In their view, the project's main aims were to develop a new approach to meet the existing need for easily recognisable quality assurance of lifelong learning. They emphasised the necessity of meeting the pragmatic needs of companies, learners, and governmental institutions in each country. Questioned further about the project aims, they expressed satisfaction with the project results, adding that the material already developed fulfilled the standards originally set. However, they regretted the fact that little time was left to test and revise the instruments with companies, training providers, and learners.

Commenting on partnership working, the Dutch partners said that after the second phase of the project they had discovered that partners' needs in relations to the project objectives were quite diverse. "This made us decide that the different partners were allowed to work on different tasks. Although some project partners therefore didn't work intensively together outside the meetings, project results were improved by this strategy". Regarding project management, the Dutch partners simply said it could have been better, but this hadn't greatly influenced the project results.

Expressing their views on the ALL products, the Dutch partners were very happy with the quality of the criteria and ALL Initial Questionnaire for Providers. "The content of the criteria is very well thought out and discussed with all the partners involved. The only question left unanswered is how well they will be used by providers, learners, and employers". They were also satisfied with the Provider and Evaluator Handbooks and thought they would serve an important role in the discussions of accreditation in the future. When asked to comment on the transferability of the system, the Dutch partners said the project had been fairly successful in creating an easily transferable system. In their own words: "to create a European accreditation system is an enormous objective that can only be reached if various parties in each country on political levels are involved". They felt that transferability could have been somewhat enhanced, either by making a lot of providers enthusiastic about the system or by involving stakeholders and decision makers to a greater degree in the process.

As for their own responsibilities in the project, the Dutch partners believed they had been successful in developing the Training Effectiveness Survey. However, like all other project members, they regretted that they had not had more time to test the material they developed. Lastly, the Dutch partners were asked about possible benefits from the project. Speaking specifically about the Training Effectiveness Survey, they believed this instrument would greatly benefit both learners and employers. In the long run, they also believed that the other tools developed in the project would benefit learners and employers, but only if the ALL quality system would be used by a wide variety of providers. In their opinion, the system will not benefit Dutch non-formal providers at all, since they have their own system and are in no need of an additional one. As for their own organisation, they believed Lava Legato had benefited from participating in the project, especially by getting a chance to meet new potential clients in the field of training and informal education.

5. Evaluation Summary

In the following section major categories of the evaluation will be commented on and several observations made on important aspects of the evaluation.

5.1 Implementation of the ALL Project

As originally planned, the project developed a well-thought-out accreditation system for lifelong learning providers. A lot of time and effort had to be put into agreeing on the project aims and a common basis from which to work. This and the suboptimal flow of communication between meetings resulted in a process that did not keep the pace the project originally set out to follow. The initial project aims were perhaps a bit too extensive to be carried out in only two years. Changes were made in the project plan to better suit the ideas and aims of each partner, the largest one being the development of a new tool for employers and learners to assess the benefits of training. Other important tasks, such as developing a business model, were cut out of the project plan due to lack of time. Although the products have not been fully developed and need testing and revising, this does not overshadow the fact that the foundation of an elaborate quality accreditation system has been laid during the project.

5.2 Impact of the ALL Project

The ALL project partners had different levels of experience in the field of accreditation and therefore experienced varying impact from participating in the project. The general impact at national levels in each country was in the form of increased knowledge and understanding of the need for quality in non-formal lifelong learning, as well as increased understanding of the needs of other countries. After this experience, project members possess valuable knowledge on developing quality assurance systems and can contribute to the enhancement of lifelong learning quality in their home country. At the international level, the project created a platform for cooperation and the opportunity to share good practice across Europe. By creating a trans-European system, the possibilities for providers to reach learners from all over Europe are greatly enhanced. Learners and employers will then be able to meaningfully compare different learning providers from all over Europe.

The final impact on the target groups at which the European Quality Mark was aimed cannot be evaluated at this time. This will only be possible if and when the system is formally launched, and accreditations will start taking place according to the outlined processes of the project. However, a preliminary evaluation of the impact can be made on the basis of the trial period carried out by Enskuskólinn. Although Enskuskólinn did not receive the external quality assurance and benefit from verifying the quality of their school, the process of working through the questionnaires and criteria proved a great asset to their organisation. Judging from their experience and the identified need of small and medium-sized learning providers to use externally set standards to improve their practice, the European Quality Mark should play a valuable role in Europe in the field of non-formal and lifelong learning.

5.3 Strengths of the ALL Project

One of the major strengths of the project was how carefully the needs analysis was carried out in the four countries contributing to the analysis, and used to guide partners in creating an accreditation system, filling a gap in the lifelong learning sector. Although situations and needs in each participating country were quite diverse, the partners managed to find common grounds in working together and developing tools they believed would serve the stated purpose in different settings. It is quite clear that without an elaborate study phase of the existing needs in each country, the system would not be based on solid grounds.

Another major strength of the project was the diverse experience the project members brought with them. Although this no doubt caused difficulties in reaching a common understanding of project aims at first, it gave the project depth, ensuring a multi-angled approach to the complex task at hand. By including an experienced learning provider in the whole process of developing the accreditation criteria and questionnaires, the voice of learning providers, the main target group of the quality assurance system, was constantly heard. The English partner was able to share its extensive experience in developing and using an accreditation system for lifelong learning, while the other partners brought expert knowledge in the wider context of non-formal learning

5.4 Weaknesses of the ALL Project

The most prominent weakness of the project was perhaps the lack of communication flow amongst the partners between the meetings. This was strongly related to inactivity during periods between the meetings and not being able to keep internal deadlines. Most of the project members mentioned this in one way or another as a liability they would have liked to overcome. Some important tasks in the project, e.g., the ALL criteria and the Initial Provider Questionnaire, were the result of close cooperation, which to some extent all the partners seemed to have contributed to. Other tasks were in a way the private enterprise of a single partner. The Training Effectiveness Survey developed by the Dutch partner is, for example, a wonderful contribution to the project, but it seems to have been developed in isolation from other project members, perhaps without giving thought to where or how it would fit into the project aims.

Another weakness is related to the sheer extensiveness of the project. Keeping in mind that this is a two-year project, the task of developing a system, testing it sufficiently in order to enhance quality and transferability, and formulating a business model in order to promote and disseminate the system, was simply too extensive. Thus, certain crucial questions regarding the system's usage, transferability, and valorisation are left unanswered. Without a business model it is quite impossible to disseminate and sell the products. The European Quality Mark is especially aimed at small and medium-sized learning providers lacking the resources to invest in expensive quality assurance. Minimising the application expenses in terms of time and money will therefore be a large factor in its success. Also, the project has yet to

provide evidence of transferability to different learning sectors and countries by testing its products fully.

5.5 Dissemination of the ALL Project

One of the main dissemination strategies of the project was the ALL website, which was created during the first phases of the project. The web site is user-friendly and provides basic information regarding the project. A promotional brochure was also designed, containing much the same information. The web site could perhaps have been even better applied as a promotional platform, providing potential clients and stakeholders with further information regarding the processes involved in the application process, how the system was developed, as well as how they will benefit from the whole quality assurance process.

Project participants have handled dissemination strategies in their own way, and as yet a collective presentation of the project's final products has not been made. Nonetheless, project members have presented the project to a number of organisations, language networks, and private learning providers, attracting interest in the system. The Dutch partner developed a nice brochure for the Dutch market, in order to promote the Training Effectiveness Survey. The UK has effectively used mailers across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland and emailed information across the Regional Language Networks in England. The Italian partner has also sent brochures to all local providers in Sardinia and received some local media coverage on the project. The Norwegian partner has promoted the project by attending meetings and conferences and handing out information leaflets and brochures, while the Icelandic partner keeps in close contact with its advisory board members, ensuring that information on the project is passed to national stakeholders.

5.6 Observations and Future Directions

All the project members agreed that participating in the project had been a very informative experience, widening their understanding of quality assurance and providing them with valuable knowledge on how to assess and enhance the quality of non-formal education and training. Developing a whole new approach to quality assuring learning providers in two years is no small task. Although a lot was accomplished in these two years, there is still a lot of work ahead before the European Quality Mark can be implemented, and accreditation centres are established. Some

important future tasks are worth mentioning, the most important one concerning proper testing of the tools developed. Since the system has so far been tested exclusively in an Icelandic language school, it desperately requires testing in other countries and in different learning sectors. The same goes for The Training Effectiveness Survey, developed and tested in the Netherlands without much consultation from other participating countries. Another important task worth mentioning concerns the training of evaluators and the role and practice of national accreditation centres. As the system is intended for use in varied learning sectors and cannot be too specific, the necessity for highly qualified evaluators is urgent. Although basic processes concerning the appointment of evaluators have been outlined, the question of who will provide training and how this will be done is still left unanswered. Finally, an elaborate business plan has yet to be formulated. As stated above, without such a plan the valorisation of the project becomes nearly impossible. Hopefully, project members will get a chance to fully develop the European Quality Mark and apply all the good work already put into the project, to the advancement of non-formal lifelong education and training in Europe.