



# Recognition of Experiential & Accredited Learning (REAL) Project 527723-LLP-1-2012-1-UK-GRUNDTVIG-GMP

## The Real Project

### Final Quality Report

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#### Introduction

This Final Evaluation Report is based on the activities that were laid out in the Quality Plan designed at the outset of the project by the External Evaluator, and should be read in conjunction with the Interim Evaluation Report produced in 2013. Some elements of that earlier report are re-iterated here.

The Quality Plan indicates that the role of the external evaluator is to ensure technical process evaluation of the project by monitoring the project's progress and to ensure an impartial view on the project. Further, in order to be able to assess the project's progress adequately, this plan indicated that the external evaluator would participate in at least two partner meetings throughout the life of the project and as determined in consultation with the Project Coordinator. It was also agreed that he would liaise with the Project Coordinator to ensure that there is synergy between evaluation activities and those of quality assurance as laid out in the *Quality Plan* as detailed in WP7. This would involve an overall comparative overview of the work of partners against a range of criteria as described below.

He would conduct formative evaluation of the project through the monitoring of deliverables and results according to the work packages and including partners' perceptions of the project's progress.

This report draws on some of the material included in the Interim report, which was based on: attendance at one partner meeting (Stirling – 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013), regular bi-monthly meetings with the original Project Co-ordinator on the 26<sup>th</sup> April, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 6<sup>th</sup> August and the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013; reports from other partner meetings in Tallinn in April/May 2013 and in Timisoara in October 2013 and analysis of materials produced by the project, most particularly those published on the website. It is enhanced by attendance at further partner meetings in Tallinn (7 November 2014) and Stirling (26 March 2014); a dissemination event in Tallinn (6 November 2014); the final dissemination of the project at Stirling (27 March 2014); regular meetings with the successor Project Coordinator Professor Richard Edwards (19 March 2014, 28 May 2014, 5 August 2014) and regular email communication; regular exchanges with partners by email; and further analysis of project materials in hard copy and online form.

The evaluation is an overall analysis of the *internal processes* and the *overall management processes* of the project based on its objectives and a range of other indicators as specified in the Quality Plan.

The indicators overall used for *the internal processes and management processes* are:-

- Project deliverables are delivered on time
- Monitoring of risks and analysis of project milestones
- The day to day running of the consortium
- The management of communication within the consortium
- The management of communication between the consortium and the Commission

For each of these indicators a four-point scale is used to assess the progress of the work plans and achievement to date. This four point scale is:-

i/all goals achieved, ii/most goals achieved iii/considerable numbers of goals still to be achieved iv/unsatisfactory

The analysis in this report also covers the following indicators

- *A comparative analysis of the quality of the deliverables (based on the status reports of workpackages 2-6) & a commentary*
- *A comparative analysis of the external impact of the project (based on the dissemination reporting and partners' national stakeholder for a (WP8 and 9)*
- *The effectiveness of the quality cycle*
- *Actions of WP leaders and partners as a result of feedback, particularly in relation to the recommendations made in the Interim Report*

These areas of evaluation are dealt with below.

The project Coordinator was asked to report against these indicators and subsequently the partners have been asked to comment on their perceptions of effectiveness of these aspects of the project.

## **Progress against Indicators**

### ***A/ An analysis of the internal processes and management processes***

#### Project deliverables are delivered on time

The Scoping Exercise (WP2 product) was delivered according to schedule and was published on the website ([www.realrpl.eu](http://www.realrpl.eu)).

Initial issues related to the development, testing and production of the RPL Toolkit (WP3, WP4 and WP5) and establishment of the website. Development and testing of the initial Toolkit, and establishment of the website were delayed slightly and were reported earlier in the Interim Report, at which time (December 2013) they had been dealt with in a satisfactory manner. Since that time further issues emerged in relation to the Toolkit, and indeed other WPs, most notably due to the very serious illness of the original Project Co-ordinator, which will be returned to later. In relation to WP3, WP4 and WP5, there was a legitimate change of direction based on the experience of piloting an interactive online version, itself an agreed (by the EC Project Office) deviation from the original intention. This was legitimate in the sense that it was based on evidence gathered in trialling the online tool, developed in the UK by the UK partners, to national contexts of Estonia, Romania and Ireland. Instead online materials were developed, which could be downloaded.

This can be judged to be a success in as much some very systematic materials have been developed for both adult educators themselves who seek to gain credit, and for workshop leaders and mentors, and these have been tested by all partners. These have been designed in generic form for use across Europe, as well as in customised form for specific countries. Thus versions of these two Toolkits are available for one part of the UK, Scotland, within which there is autonomy in matters of education. A 'Reflective Account' Template and 'Goal Setting' Template is also available, with the convenience of being offered both as Word and Powerpoint documents. Complementary material is also made available on the website showing how the competency framework was created with links to relevant material.

One other country specific toolkit adapted to national context is in the process of being produced in Romania. Currently this and other potential toolkits are not available on the website at the appropriate linkage point. In a sense this is not a vital omission given that a generic version exists and it was not envisaged in the proposal that specific toolkits would be created and that translations would be undertaken. These are therefore **additional** products. It would be wise, however, to indicate on the website that country specific toolkits are in preparation where that is the case.

WP6 was concerned with matters of credit exchange. The benchmarking of the REAL toolkit against both against National Qualifications Frameworks and the European Qualification Framework provides a basis for systematic credit exchange arrangements. Opportunities exist for this potential to be exploited much more in the future. In Romania progress was thwarted during the course of the project because of national level policy changes, but there is still potential for the future.

#### Monitoring of risks and analysis of project milestones

In the Interim Report, I noted that the then Project Co-ordinator has been exemplary in monitoring risks and ensuring that any setbacks have been remediated, and indeed build upon to advantage. At that point in the project one of partners was not able to fulfil all the requirements of WP3 because of staffing changes, and adjustments were made so that the co-ordinating institutions could carry out this work. There were also delays in developing and implementing the website, and this was also remediated without undue problems.

Subsequently the very serious illness of the co-ordinator caused extreme stress on the project. It is to the credit of the University of Stirling that it was able through its procedures to combat risk to continue the project to its duration, albeit with an extension. It has done so assiduously under the leadership of Professor Edwards, mitigating the effect of the loss of Mr Bradley as co-ordinator through careful attention to meeting milestones at newly negotiated dates.

#### The day to day running of the consortium

I would assess that the consortium has been managed well throughout the period of the project by the Coordinator(s). I have continued to be copied into many email exchanges initiated by the Project Co-ordinator, and the responses of the partners.

There has been extensive dialogue and very good advice provided to partners on a very frequent basis. This has included advice that I provided and highlighted in the interim report, which I asked to be forwarded to partners since Actions were implied by this advice.

At times it would appear that responses have been not always timely from some partners, causing some stress for the Coordinator.

I recommended in my Interim Report that an attempt should be made to bring Learning Link Scotland actively back into the partnership since this would be to its advantage if they were involved given that

they are an agency with good links to potential beneficiaries. I also stressed that it would be important for SCQF to be engaged in year 2, because of their important national role in Scotland. This advice was followed and has created significant advantages to the project. It is to the credit of the co-ordinator and these two partners that this was achieved. Both partners have made significant contributions both nationally and on a European-wide scale.

#### The management of communication within the consortium

There appear to have been continuing good processes in place for electronic communications with partners. This has been particular the case in the second half of the project when there were unavoidable delays because of the illness of the original Coordinator. All envisaged face to face meetings have been held, and an additional meeting because of the project extension. These meetings have recorded well with clear Action Points and time lines specified for tasks against partners.

#### The management of communication between the consortium and the Commission

Throughout the project I have been informed of any communications with the EC, and have been informed of responses as appropriate. My analysis is that these communications have always been conducted in a timely and appropriate fashion. In each case where the Coordinator has identified problems that require the advice of a Desk Officer at the EC this has been taken.

*Overall Analysis - ALL GOALS ACHEIVED*

#### ***B/ A comparative analysis of the quality of the deliverables***

I have already reported on the Scoping Exercise (WP2), which considered three issues related to the recognition of experiential and accredited learning as follows: *Best Practice in Learner Centredness; Best Practice in Evidencing and Recording Previous Learning; and Best Practice in Quality Assurance*

I suggested that the document be developed further in tandem with the website and that many national and EU level documents that were cited in the report could be hot-linked either to their original source or to documents available in other parts of the site. I also suggested that where external reports were hot-linked within the site that these might be developed with a commentary and actual reports.

It would appear that some of these suggestions have been taken up with there now being a section that shows links to various projects, organisations and reports. More value would have been created if these links had been accompanied by some commentary. However, it is understandable that focus was shifted towards the more important activity of delivering the Toolkit.

The Toolkit as reported above was developed, tested and produced as a downloadable document with support materials rather than a purely online product. I recommended that feedback from learners using the Toolkit should be systematically analysed and adjustments made where necessary. This process was put into practice in both Scotland and Estonia, and reports have been produced of the results of the piloting and changes made to the Toolkit.

*Overall Analysis - MOST GOALS ACHEIVED*

#### ***C/ A comparative analysis of the external impact of the project (based on the dissemination reporting and partners' national stakeholder fora)***

In the Interim Report I was able to comment that there is a good deal of activity in terms of dissemination. This took the form largely of presentations at various conferences and meetings within the partner countries and other locations within the European Union.

Since that time with the enhancement of the website, this in itself has proved to be a more effective form of dissemination. I recommended that it be used in part as a means of increasing awareness of the project's work. With the promotion of the site at other key websites, most notably at EPALE, this is potentially a longer-term external impact of the project. Other blogs and Twitter have also been used to promote the website.

There is also good evidence of some potential longer-term impact of the project beyond its life, which is a very important outcome. This is notably the case in the UK, where a number of workshops, meetings and virtual activities are envisaged for 2015 and beyond. It has also been reported that plans are in place to explore creating a nationally recognised competency-based framework for Scotland based on the REAL framework and the development of a professional development framework for adult education in Scotland to support the REAL resources. There are also more modest plans in Estonia and Ireland. Romania has been impacted by changes in national policy with which the REAL Toolkit will be used as part of a new framework for adult educators.

Key in the process to sustain the work will be the continued availability of the resources on a suitable platform.

In my interim report I suggested that evidence of impact goes well beyond simply dissemination events having been organised and materials having been produced, but of evidence gathered from beneficiaries of the work of the project. I suggested that possible indicators that might be used might be:

- statements from beneficiaries
- surveys of beneficiaries
- references in policy documents at regional, national and EU level
- media attention
- invitations to and presentations at events organized by others
- use of outputs of the project by third parties

There is now some evidence of impacts of these sorts, particularly in the UK. There are for example a number of statements from beneficiaries (adult learning professionals who undertook piloting) as to the value of the toolkit. There is also now evidence that the outputs are being used or will be used by third parties (the Workers Educational Association in the UK, the National University of Galway in Ireland, West University of Timisoara). Some of these impacts are likely to take longer to manifest themselves – many studies of impact use much longer horizons than those available during the period of project funding.

*Overall Analysis - MOST GOALS ACHIEVED*

#### ***D/ The effectiveness of the quality cycle***

As reported earlier in the Interim Report, the quality cycle involves a clear specification of processes and actions. It has delineated responsibilities, the lynchpin of which are the relationships and communications a/ between the Project Co-ordinator and the Evaluator and b/ the Project Co-ordinator and the other partners and c/ the Evaluator and other partners. These links appear to have largely worked well.

The most effective part of this process were a and b above. Whilst the Evaluator has been able to liaise with partners in order to gain detailed information on progress, there has been a certain unevenness

in relation to their responses. This has been mediated to a large extent by the good communications with the Co-ordinator. The input of the special advisor to the project, Mr Bernard Godding was a vital contribution to the project, given the extensive advice that he was able to bring about the topic of the project and from previous EC funded projects.

*Overall Analysis - MOST GOALS ACHEIVED*

### ***E/ Actions of WP leaders and partners as a result of feedback***

Feedback made verbally at project meetings and in one-to-one meetings with the Project Coordinator, and in emails, have led to appropriate responses. As indicated above responses from other partners to suggestions made in the Interim report and through email have not always been as rapid or detailed as desirable.

*Overall Analysis - MOST GOALS ACHEIVED*

### **Final Observations**

Most or all of the goals have been achieved in this project, and this has occurred in the face of some unforeseen events, most notably the very serious illness of the original Coordinator at the University of Stirling. Fortunately a large organization has the resources to mitigate the risks from such events.

The most notable outputs are the Toolbox and associated materials, which have been comprehensively developed based on extensive research and piloting with beneficiaries. These materials provide the basis for systematic accreditation of experiential learning for adult learning practitioners across Europe. It will be important that these materials are not lost once the project ends and are made available within a stable virtual space.

The project has been managed well, and communication processes have been efficient. The Coordinator not only has taken on most of the management of the project, but also led the development of most of the products. All envisaged outputs have been produced and some that were not, and despite the greater than planned load of the UK partners, these outputs are relevant at a European level.

Dissemination has taken a number of forms, some traditional and some using various social media platforms.

It is too early to establish all of the impacts of the project since many of these are difficult to capture, and necessarily occur well after the duration of the project. Further it is difficult to establish causality. The EC might consider creating mechanisms to monitor long-term effect and could build this into the criteria for assessing future applications from partners.

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