NetworkQA
Networking for Quality Assurance

CONNECTED2

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The ultimate aim of NQCA is to

- Design,
- Develop and
- Implement

A model of Interagency Working

Which focuses on

- Quality Culture and
- Quality Assurance

Across the VET Journey.

Anything else is just not good enough.

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PUTTING THE 'QUINTESSENTIAL' INTO THE NETWORKQA QUALITY LABEL

When agencies, organisations and training providers work together sharing information, ideas and developing solutions to problems that occur along the way, we don't need rocket science to demonstrate that this will result in improved outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

The NQCA project has worked to develop the Quality Culture aspect and has aligned both Quality Culture and Quality Assurance as a key deliverable when key stakeholders network to improve learner outcomes.

Our work undertaken in Ireland, Italy, Germany, Finland, Hungary, United Kingdom and N. Ireland over the past two years has borne out our idea that networking to improve learner outcomes is supported, encouraged and enabled when it is underpinned by a shared quality culture in the network, leading to quality assured results.

We have worked to develop and test a range of tools and resources that will assist other organisations to consider working within the Network QA Framework regardless of the context they work in.

NOT JUST ANOTHER LABEL FOR THE LETTERHEAD, WEBSITE OR APPLICATION.....

The NQCA partnership in developing tools and resources, intends these to be used by organisations networking with other organisations to improve learner outcomes in Vocational Education and Training. We acknowledge that just as in our partnership, every organisation is different and some are bound by legislative and or policy rules and requirements. However, we believe that notwithstanding these issues, NQCA has provided valuable resources that will be of use to any organisation, agency or institution that wants to improve learner outcomes through networking for quality culture and quality assurance.

The NQCA tools and resources are freely available; however, we ask that any organisation that intends to use them takes a moment to reflect on the values, ethics and practice principles that underpin the tools and resources. To make effective use of the NQCA tools and resources it is critical that organisations understand that the people involved are as important as the processes undertaken. Without a **shared commitment** to addressing any organisational/institutional barriers that often constrain the development of the cultural competence that supports, encourages and enables agencies to network and together commit to getting the best possible outcome for disadvantaged learners.

Accordingly, whilst we do not require organisations and institutions to undertake a readiness assessment to demonstrate they are at a stage and place to make optimum use of the Network QA tools and resources, we advise that they undertake a self-assessment of their readiness to implement Network QA.

Further information and access to the NQCA resources can be accessed here: **http://www.nqca.eu**

NQCA Closing Conference in Berlin 11th October 2017

In Berlin the NQCA partnership was able to share the NQCA project journey, the expected results and the added-value outcomes and impacts achieved during the project journey.

The event kicked off with a welcome and overview of the day from Francesca Di Paolantonio, MetropolisNet EEIG/Ciofs-FP and Jasmin Zouizi MetropolisNet EEIG; this was followed by a presentation by Mick Creedon, Ballymun Job Centre Co-operative, and the NQCA project lead partner. Jazmin Zouizi then chaired a round-table discussion on the Berlin example with Maizah Alizadah, Mahin Shirani Bidabadi and Dr Thomas Nittka.


After a break for coffee delegates had the opportunity to visit the NQCA 'Market Place' where each partner organisation had set up a stall which outlined the NQCA journey from their city perspective. Those attending reflected that this interactive approach enabled them to ask specific questions and learn more about the NQCA project.

Jazmin Zouizi then introduced the NQCA tools and resources emerging from the work and intellectual outputs of the project. Again, there was great interest in the products and learning. This was followed by a presentation from Matti Mäkelä, Head of the PMO City of Turku / Education Division who made an interesting and thought-provoking presentation on '**projects, results, effects and impacts**' The closing presentation was made by the NQCA project External Evaluator, Finbarr Fitzpatrick who set the Social Impact Evaluation context and provided the impacts from the learner and the inter-agency perspectives.

Feedback from delegates on the day was highly positive with very good interest from those attending in the project and also on the tools and resources that would assist them and their organisations to network for quality culture and quality assurance.
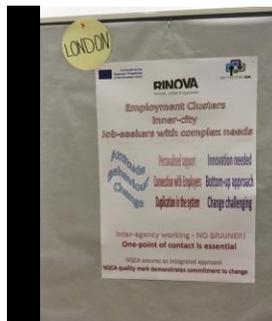
SOCIAL IMPACT EVALUATION IO6

Finbarr Fitzpatrick

The Social Impact Evaluation was intellectual output 6 of the Networking for Quality Culture and Assurance (NQCA) project. This output evaluated the impact of the project by measuring the social value created for a range of key stakeholders across the life of the project.

Finbarr Fitzpatrick carried out the social impact evaluation Finbarr has worked in the field of evaluation and social research for over 15 years in the statutory and third sectors across both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. He has completed a range of robust stakeholder driven impact evaluations for VET European funded projects under the European Social Fund and EU Lifelong Learning Programmes.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The NQCA social impact evaluation included the formative and summative evaluation of the project against of the Erasmus + requirements in the areas of project management, partnership working, dissemination, innovation and sustainability. The evaluation found

- The project partnership worked very effectively achieving all the activity targets, highlighting the quality and scope of the work achieved in each of the 6 Intellectual Output areas.

- Despite partner countries differing in quality structures, tasks and context, NQCA stakeholders benefitted from the development and integration of a common quality language and interagency approach.

- The dissemination was strategically targeted at local, regional and national agencies involved in the policy design and delivery of Vocational Education Training VET, many of whom have begun to contribute to the sustainability of the NQCA through embedding the policy toolkit into their work.

- NQCA was innovative and flexible in how it enabled partners to implement the model with diverse case study groups who had many barriers to advancement in VET and who had not engaged for many years.

- The main key stakeholders to be: Learners, Partner Organisations, Inter Agency Organisations and National Organisations.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT - LEARNER

- Improved engagement with VET providers which is significant as many had previous negative experience of VET.

- Increased knowledge on the services and supports available.

- Progression in VET journey: CV Development, Interview Preparation, Job Interviews and Employment.

- Improved confidence, self-esteem, social inclusion and mental health.

- Learners felt more valued as they were consulted and involved in issues which directly impacted on them.

- Increased resilience and capacity to manage transition

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT – INTER AGENCY

- New knowledge and expertise acquired in quality assurance.

- Agencies challenged to look at their internal quality processes to ensure they are fit for purpose.

- Enhanced understanding of shared responsibility at a local level for supporting, encouraging and enabling collaboration and knowledge-sharing to support a quality process

- Improving relationship and mutual trust of all stakeholders – "no more competitors but partners" thus strengthening collaborations and sharing responsibility in supporting learners to achieve their final goals and achieve their place in the labour market. Inter-agency groups have occupied the vacuum left by the discontinuation of community based labour market forums due to funding restrictions.

- Shared knowledge of labour market opportunities across the membership of the groups improved outcomes for some hard to reach clients.

- Opportunities for partnership and collaborations with inter-agency group members

- Strong lobby for funding and policy change

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT – PARTNER & NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Additional knowledge and expertise acquired in the embedding of quality culture across each partner organization.

- NQCA tools have provided increased visibility for partner organisations nationally.

- NQCA has enabled a consistency of approach to align all VET policy makers in quality assurance, culture and inter agency working which are integral to effective national employment services.

- The NQCA inter agency model is transferable to many statutory policy contexts and has the capacity to significantly reduce policy practice gaps through a bottom up approach shaped by ensuring the learner voice is represented in policy design.

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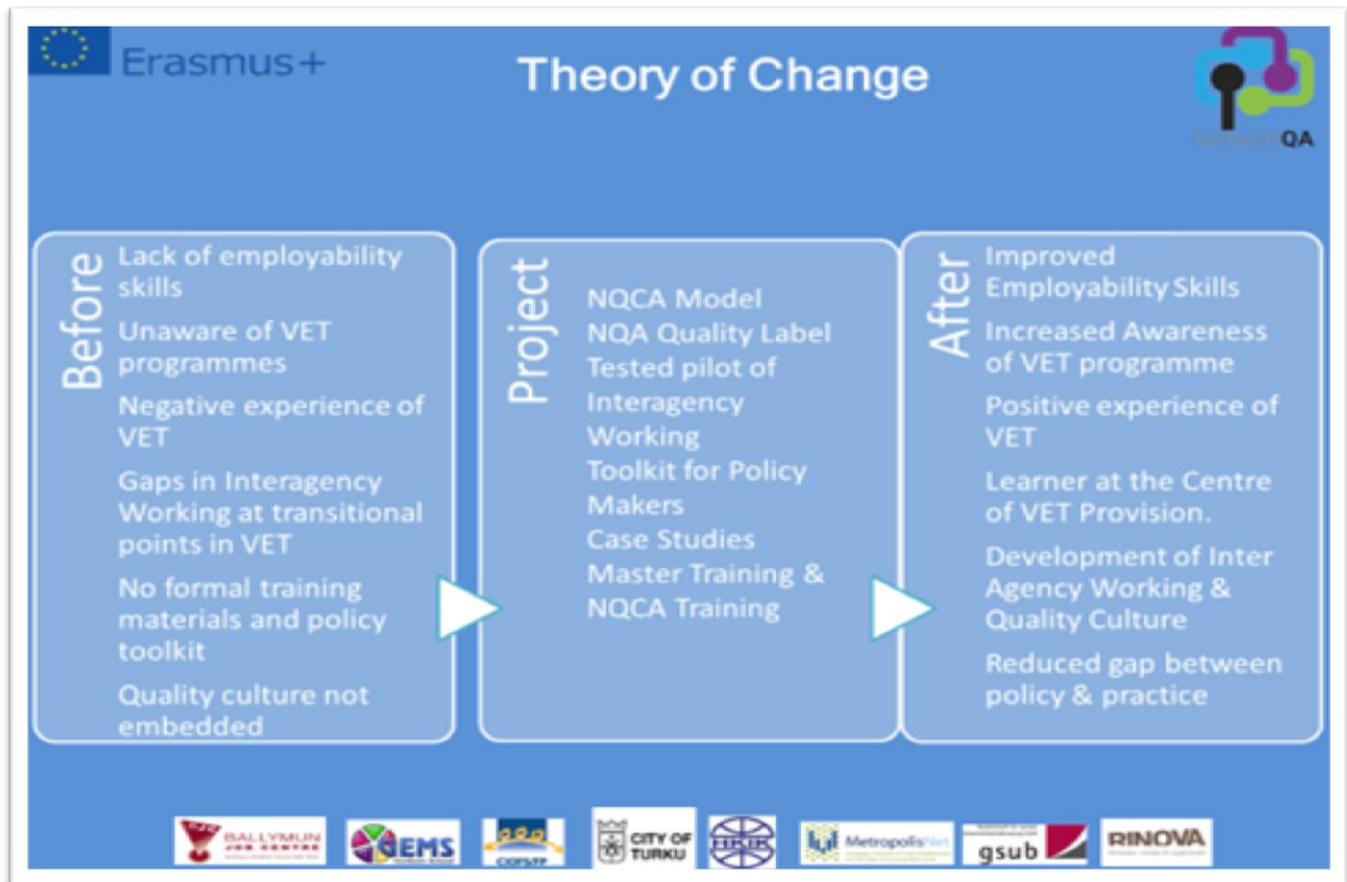
HOW DID WE DO?

The following can only illustrate the key NQCA tasks activities – the results of this project have been both expected and unexpected – the added value that comes from working together, sharing knowledge, ideas and findings from our local groups.

Reference	Description	Result
IO1	An adapted Net-Working for Quality Assurance model relevant for the wider VET journey, across a variety of case studies and across partner countries	✔
IO2	The NQA Quality label. To develop the Net-Working for Quality Assurance (NQA) brand into a quality label, launch and establish it in each partner country so that it becomes recognisable in each of the associated countries as a label that represents quality from the bottom-up	✔
IO3	Implementing the revised NQCA model, the aim will be to place quality culture at the core of Quality Assurances processes by building interagency networks across the partnership countries that will commit to developing quality cultures within and across the interagency participant organisations. Ownership of the approach will be enabled by involving the relevant individuals from the outset.	✔
IO4	Toolkit for Policy Impact The purpose of developing the toolkit is to provide a	✔

	document which can be used by policy makers to participate in and support the development of Quality Culture and Quality Assurance at national, regional and local levels.		
IO5	NCQA Training and Master Training In this regard, the aim is to further adapt the training developed in the original NQA project for interested parties in the area of interagency working and quality culture and assurance, to be used to train two Master Trainers from each partner country who will deliver one training course each in their own country.	✓	
IO6	Social Impact Evaluation This aims to evaluate the impact of interagency working by measuring the social value created for a range of key stakeholder organisations across the partnership, by an objective external evaluator.	✓	

The achievement of these results was underpinned by the partnership's commitment to achieving the NQCA project aims and the excellent communication between all partners – taking responsibility for the achievement of all intellectual outputs not just the one an individual partner was activity leader for. We had regular partnership meetings, skype meetings and made effective use of the project basecamp to ensure we kept track of activities and equally important completion deadlines. Our Multiplier events where held in line with the project intellectual output completion/results and provided a effective backdrop to showcase the findings and invite comments and questions on the NQCA project generally and on key aspects such IO4, the toolkit for policy impact.

Reference	Date	Description	Location
ME 1	December 2015	Launch of the NQCA Interagency Network	Dublin, Ireland
ME 2	April 2016	Quality Culture and Quality Assurance in Apprenticeships	Turku, Finland
ME 3	June 2016	Interagency Network	Dublin, Ireland
ME4	September 2016	Quality Culture and Quality Assurance: National, regional, Local	Milan, Italy
ME 5	February 2017	Measuring Interagency and Quality Culture	Belfast Northern Ireland
MT	March 2017	Master Training in Interagency working, quality culture and assurance	Dublin, Ireland
ME 6	April 2017	Quality Culture and Quality Assurance in Workplace Learning	Eger, Hungary
ME 7 ME 8	July 2017	NQCA in Practice	London, United Kingdom

WHAT'S NEXT?

Networking for quality culture and quality assurance can never be marked "complete" by its very nature quality is a continuous process of improvement which requires commitment, communication and often, compromise. There is still work to do; our project website will remain live and enable the tools and resources to be shared. We invite organisations, agencies and institutions who embrace the Network QA quality label to let us know what they are doing.

Moving forward, we might explore the importance of quality culture and quality assurance can improve learner transitions, specifically retention and success, aiming to make the transition into further education smoother and more understandable for disadvantaged learners.

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