

Valmopris - Evaluation concept and plan

Background of the evaluation

The present Evaluation and Quality Assurance plan has been devised from the project Valmopris - Validation and Motivation for (in)formal Learning in Prison, a European co-funded Strategic Partnership that is financed within the ERASMUS+ programme under the Key Action “Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices”/Strategic Partnerships for adult education.

The project’s main aims are:

- to enhance the learning dimension of training or working activities in prison by the validation of informal learning
- to raise the motivation of adults involved in prison education - particularly those from broadly socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds – to pursue further learning and career orientation opportunities
- to provide a new approach for the validation of informal learning in the context of prison education
- to train prison educators to work with this new validation approach
- to validate the competences developed by prisoners during their education experience

The strategic partnership is made up of 7 partners from different European countries and it is coordinated by New College Lanarkshire from the UK (Scotland). Apart from the general contribution to project activities and outputs, die Berater® is entrusted with the internal evaluation and quality assurance of the Valmopris - project.

General Principles of the VALMOPRIS Evaluation

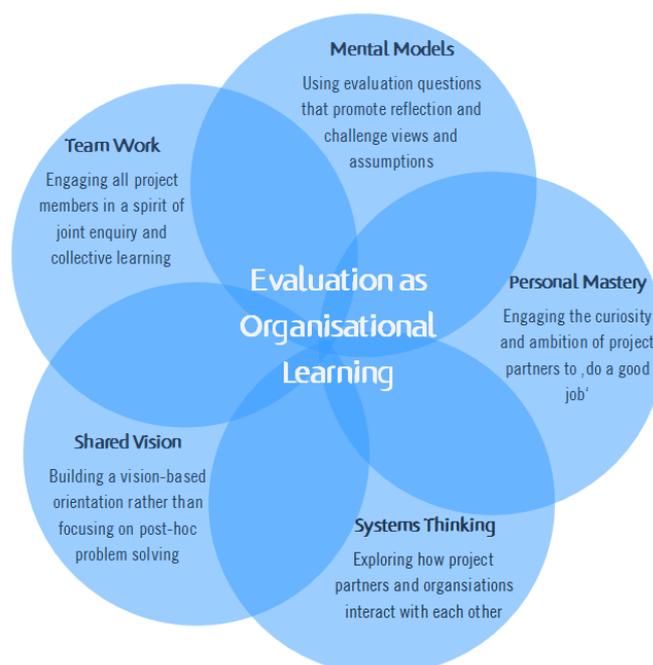
- This Evaluation Plan is a key document in the management and assurance of quality in the Valmopris project. Responsibility for quality is shared between all partners and the impact of actions and inactions by each partner is acknowledged and open to challenge in striving for quality outcomes.
- Quality outcomes are sought in terms of the efficacy and efficiency of working practices as well as the efficacy and efficiency of the methodology proposed, the training and other auxiliary products.
- The Evaluation Plan seeks to establish the procedures and standards to be employed in the Valmopris project and locates responsibility for ensuring that these procedures and standards are followed. It lays out the activities and indicators that will ensure that overall quality control is carried out effectively, that quality control mechanisms are adequately planned, and plans are followed, reviewed and updated in light of experience and changing circumstances.

- The Evaluation Plan is effective throughout the lifespan of the project but it is open to review. Whilst the main overall goals of the plan should remain constant, some of the more detailed objectives, indicators and tools may need to be modified as the project proceeds. Where this is the case, such modifications need to be made explicit for the purposes of evaluation.

Introduction to the Evaluation Concept

The purpose of the current evaluation is not only to evaluate the project outcomes and to inform the partnership on their progress towards meeting defined goals, but rather to support the capacity building of the partnership, to help them to improve practice through building knowledge and reflecting on activities and approaches. The evaluation seeks to develop the project manager's ability to respond and adapt in different ways to the need of the project partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries. The ultimate objective of the evaluation is to enable the project partnership to fulfil the requirements of the project, demonstrating **progress**, with the highest level of **quality** and the most effective level of **co-operation**, whilst aligning all activities within an appropriate **sustainability** framework.

Viewing the project partnership not as a static entity, but rather as a dynamic, learning organisation, the evaluation will challenge the views and assumptions of the partnership, steering them towards the successful achievement of the project goals. Seeing the partnership as a learning organisation, we must consider the various ways in which groups and individuals can learn through the evaluation process, that is, the ways in which these groups and individuals can change the ways they see their work, their objectives and their inter-relationships within the context of the project.



Quality, co-operation and sustainability

The focus of the internal project evaluation takes on the four distinct, but inter-connected, critical success factors of progress, quality, co-operation and sustainability. It is necessary to evaluate these areas separately, although they can influence each other, so as to ensure that effective strategies and approaches are in place that target, explicitly, these critical success factors. A fifth factor – effectiveness – is also critical to project success, concerning the effect of ‘on the ground’ project implementation. This is not within the scope of the internal evaluation, but exists as its own work-stream, and will be conducted as a stand-alone activity by the responsible work-stream leader.

Progress refers to the way in which the project is achieving its milestones in respect to the schedule set out in the project application and grant agreement. This aspect seeks to determine whether planned deliverables have been realised and whether the project is on track to achieve its contractual obligations. It is a purely quantitative evaluation of what has been achieved, and what is currently in progress, and will serve to revise estimates on delivery times, whilst acting as an early warning system to highlight any activities that are falling behind and making recommendations as to how to bring the project back on track.

Quality refers to the project outputs. Quality is both an objective value, determined by referencing the qualitative and quantitative descriptors of product outputs given in the project description, to determine whether the output meets the minimum quality criteria required, and a subjective value, determined by the group consensus on whether any given output is of an acceptable quality to the group, or whether improvements can and should be made.

Co-operation refers to the inter-relationship between internal project actors, but also between the project actors and external stakeholders. It concerns the ‘people’ dimension of the project. It is a highly subjective area that requires trust and confidence within the partnership, and with the evaluator. Group and one-to-one discussions will help to determine the extent to which project partners feel comfortable in their role within the project. Simulations and projections may help to identify improvements in the working climate, and enhance the inter-personal aspect of the project.

Sustainability is an often-overlooked success factor which is often seen as an attribute of ‘effectiveness’. However, sustainability needs to be integrated into the project from the very beginning, and an evaluation of sustainability requires its own set of criteria. Certain factors such as the design of project outputs, the involvement of stakeholders, and the institutional- and organisational capacity of project partners will all impact the sustainability potential of the project, and activities need to be evaluated on the basis of their alignment to a sustainability perspective.

Central Questions

To evaluate the implementation of the project **Valmopris** there needs to be a set of core evaluation questions. Based on these evaluation questions, the quality assurance evaluator will establish a logical framework built around indicators collectively decided upon in collaboration with members of the consortium. These questions are:

- Is the project progressing in alignment with the schedule set out in the application, or with a revised schedule agreed upon by the consortium?
- Are the deliverables of a sufficient quality in terms of both formal expectations (contractual obligations) and informal expectations (partners' wishes)?
- Are partners satisfied with the management of the project and the cooperation between partners, and is this cooperation yielding positive effects on project implementation and delivery?
- Are partners approaching the project with a pro-sustainability mind-set, engaging in activities that will yield long-term benefits, and producing outputs that are conducive to sustainable outcomes?

Tools and Approaches

Log-frame matrices have been created for the **project**, **person** and the **impact sustainability**. These are considered as three different – if sometimes overlapping – evaluation frameworks:

- Focusing on **project success** is important in achieving the goals agreed to with the ERASMUS plus programme, as outlined in the project description and work-plan
- Focusing on the **person** is concerned with maintaining a positive working environment, and that the project meets the personal and professional needs of the individuals
- Focusing on the **impact sustainability** allows for the project activities to be critically evaluated in light of the extent to which they will contribute to a long-term impact of the project.

Whilst all three aspects are important, **impact sustainability** is a cornerstone of the project. Project success and personal ownership, whilst also independent evaluation criteria, are both necessary factors of sustainability, and whilst all three will be evaluated independently, an overriding focus on sustainability should help to ensure that other quality factors are also in place.

These matrices will be referred to by the evaluator as a means of structuring the evaluation and its topics, but will not be a formal document distributed to project participants. This removes the formal and bureaucratic feeling of the project, which, through the contractual and financial requirements, may already be experienced as overwhelming. The matrices will be used to the evaluator in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the project.

Methodology of the Evaluation

The evaluation will cover both the quality of the envisaged project process and the project outputs. The Evaluation in the project will be predominantly **formative**, but will also **include summative aspects**.

Formative evaluation is conducted while the project is going on and aims at finding areas for improvement to optimise the effectiveness of the project by providing intermediate results which can serve as a basis for decision-making. Thus, the quality of the project can be improved. In contrast, summative evaluation intends to determine the overall quality of the project and its results at the end of the project period.

Process evaluation in the scope of this project refers to the process of transnational cooperation within the partnership. The process evaluation involves

- the degree to which defined goals and tasks have been achieved;
- the quality of transnational project meetings;
- the cooperation and communication between meetings;
- the involvement of partners
- the project coordination;
- the personal and organisational learning process of the people and institutions involved;

The project's core activities and products to be evaluated in the VALMOPRIS product evaluation are

- the Valmopris training course (including training material, the e-platform, and e-learning material)
- the piloting of the Valmopris Methodology (Level5)
- the Valmopris final event

The main outputs – the Valmopris methodology to validate competences in informal learning, the training course (including the Valmopris training material) will be intensively commented and discussed by all project team members (internal evaluation). Apart from this external feedback will be gained by collecting systematic feedback from training participants and persons involved in the piloting activities.

Description of the evaluation work

- Task 1: Drafting an evaluation plan setting out the aspects, instruments and times of evaluation intervention;
- Task 2: Distributing the evaluation plan among partners for discussion and agreement;
- Task 3: Finalising evaluation instruments (questionnaires, interview guidelines, etc.) for the project (ongoing task);
- Task 4: Using evaluation instruments at agreed times (ongoing task with collaboration from all partners);
- Task 5: Creating a goal and objectives map for project partners, for reference throughout the project;

- Task 6: Creating short interim evaluation reports to be distributed to all partners, presentation of interim evaluation results (progress evaluation) at the partners meetings (steering group meetings) and discussion to explore ways to improve the situation – if necessary, also with a special focus on sustainability aspects;
- Task 7: Writing a final evaluation report.

The project evaluation is drafted by the responsible partners for evaluation and quality assurance and describes internal and external evaluation activities with regard to project **progress, quality** and **sustainability**.

Internal evaluation			
What?	Aspects of the Evaluation	Evaluation instruments	When?
Quality of the kick-off meeting and other project meetings	Achievements Efficiency Structure and content Clarity about roles and tasks Practical arrangements Overall satisfaction	Online questionnaire	Directly after the kick-off meeting After 2 nd project meeting After 3 rd project meeting After 4 th project meeting
Goals, objectives and perspectives - sustainability	Personal goals Organisational goals Clarity about roles and tasks Common understanding of tasks	Informal, unstructured interviews with project partners (members of steering group)	At the kick-off meeting Second short online interview between first and second partner meeting Between the second and third partner meeting Between the third and fourth partner meeting
Project progress	Work implemented Achievements and challenges Cooperation in the consortium Project coordination Learning process	Online questionnaire Based on the results: Review discussion at the meeting	In advance of each face-to-face project meeting At the project meeting: short presentation of results of online evaluation, additional discussion
Overall project achievement	Compliance with aims set in the project plan Lessons learned Side effects Sustainability	Online questionnaire Structured discussion facilitated by internal evaluator	In advance of the final meeting At the final meeting: additional discussion of results

Evaluation instruments used for the internal evaluation

- Valmopris project meeting evaluation form (online form - see annex)
- Valmopris progress evaluation form (online form - see annex)
- Interview guideline (see annex)

Evaluation of project outcomes (internal/external)			
What?	Aspects of the Evaluation	Evaluation instruments	When?
Valmopris training course – including the e-learning course and the e-learning material -face-to-face training course	Overall course quality Usefulness & feasibility Clarity of course goals and content Relevance and applicability for prison teachers/educators	Online questionnaire - external	After the Valmopris training course (NL) - f2f part - E-learning part
Piloting of the validation methodology Feedback of prison teachers/educators	Overall satisfaction with the methodology Usability (suitable for work in the context of prison education) Relevance for needs of prisoners Sustainability aspects (plans about future use)	Questionnaire - external Interviews with the prison teachers/educators	After piloting – <i>will be done in coordination with IO Research</i>
Piloting of the validation methodology Feedback of prisoners - if possible	Clarity of benefits for prison learners Relevance for needs of prison learners (importance of certificate) Influence on motivation to learn	Questionnaire - external Feedback of prisoners	After piloting <i>and in coordination with IO Research</i>
Valmopris multiplier event in RO	Overall satisfaction with the event	Something interactive like “Bulls eye”, Mood stickers etc.	At the event
2 nd training course (which will be held in combination with Multiplier event)	<u>f2f training course</u> Overall course quality Usefulness & feasibility Clarity of course goals and content Relevance and applicability for prison teachers / educators	Questionnaire to participants of the second training course	To be filled and collected right after the event

Evaluation Criteria and intended focus (Matrice)	Project success	Satisfaction and ownership (person)	sustainability
1.The Project/Consortium			
1.1. the project is on schedule	x		x
1.2. there is a clear theory of change*			x
1.3. the project has dedicated leadership*	x	x	x
1.4. the project has competent leadership*	x	x	x
1.5. The project is innovative*			x
1.6. The project uses volunteers alongside professional staff*			x
1.7. The project developed human capital (consortium wide)*		x	x
1.8. The project had multiple sources of funding*			x
1.9. Had a fund raising strategy*			x
1.10. Project staff are ready to take risks*			x
1.11. Project members experience individual membership*	x	x	x
1.12. Project goals are aligned with personal goals†		x	x
1.13. Has staff with mixed – project and operational roles in the organisation†			x
2. The Host organisation			
2.1. the project developed human capital (organisation wide)*			x
2.2. the project was integrated into the host organisation structure*			x
2.3. is stable*			x
2.4. assigned priority to the programme*		x	x
2.5. lobbied or campaigned for the project*			x
2.6. project goals are aligned with organisational goals†		x	x
3. Responding to external environment			
3.1 The project has a sufficiently-detailed understanding of the external environment (including the host organisation)†	x	x	x
3.2.The project invites direct input from stakeholders†	x		x
3.3.The project is aware of and can adapt to (changing) anchors in national public policy†			x
3.4 The project is aware of the structure of organisations and institutions required to facilitate sustainability†			x
4. Influencing external environment			
4.1. Benefited attractive target group*	x		x
4.2. Cooperated with local and extended community*	x		x
4.3. There is ongoing and systematic communication and interaction with the external environment†			x
4.4. Encourages personal emotional connections to the project from amongst people outside of the project†			x
4.5. The project delivered outputs that met the needs of the target group*	x		x
4.6. The project delivered outputs that were of a sufficient quality to expect sustainability†	x		x
4.7. The project delivered outputs that providers can be proud to continue†	x	x	x
4.8. The products are adaptable to as broad-a-target-group as possible†			x

*Factors identified by Savaya et al (2008) in sustainable community programmes

†Factors identified by Talbot (2014) as promoting sustainability European-funded programmes