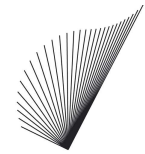


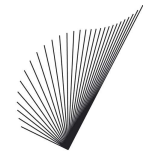
EXTERNAL MID TERM EVALUATION REPORT OF THE IDOL PROJECT

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1. Introduction

a. The project

i. Basics

This is an external mid-term evaluation report of the “IDOL International Development Officer – Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning” project. The project is co-financed by the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme, Sub-programme Leonardo da Vinci, priority Development of Innovation.

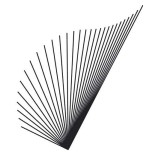
ii. Objective and outputs

The main aim of the IDOL project is to find a solution to the changing role of teachers and trainers in VET through recognition and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning by creating an integrated European system of identifying, assessing and recognising vocational competence-based qualifications of International Development Officer (IDO).

The project is targeted to teachers, trainers, tutors working as international activities developers, EU project managers, international coordinators and similar professionals in VET schools/institutes or in working life institutes.

There are several sub-objectives in the project:

- **Vocational competence-based qualifications of the international development officer.** Teachers and trainers working as international activities developers or planners or international coordinators have a great responsibility of developing international activities. They are experienced professionals who have acquired lots of informal and non-formal learning during their careers, besides their basic formal education. The IDOL will give them the possibility to validate their informal and non-formal learning and the competences they have by creating a set of competence-based qualifications of International Development Officer
- **An improvement of the professional status.** The professional status of the officers will be improved by the new qualifications.
- **A training programme** to develop the skills needed for the International Development Officer. The future IDOs get new learning opportunities in the two main fields related to their tasks, the international activities and the intercultural dialogue/competence
- **Competence-based tests** are included in the training programme. They give the participants a unique opportunity to show their competences in real communication situations such as taking part in a negotiation between representatives of widely different cultures, leading a team of programme planners, negotiating new training places for a large group of trainees, and so on
- **A cost-effective way of creating a new professional status.** The work of an international coordinator multi-faceted, including various different tasks and duties, many of them have not even existed before. The scope of the work consists of several traditional university subjects, from linguistics to economics. A university degree would take time and become considerably more expensive. And still it would not accept informal and non-formal learning.



- **A new possibility of building professional networks.** The international development officers will be able to create a network for functioning as an expert group in questions and matters in international activities and intercultural dialogue
- **Further development of skills and competences.** The IDOs will be able better to choose and evaluate what new skills they will need in the future. Also, the networks of the new professionals have now the possibility to together decide about further development of their skills and competences.

Project consortium has also defined some outputs or deliverables they will produce in the project:

- **Finding out what has been done so far**

The project will make a state-of-the art study concerning VET schools and institutes: what are the best practices; what kind of systems of recognising non- formal and informal learning exists in partner countries; what kind of qualifications and needs do professionals in charge of international and intercultural activities have. This will be the basis of our project's work towards promoting a systematic development of international cooperation and intercultural dialogue in VET institutes.

- **Creating a system of validating non-formal and informal learning in the case of IDOs**

The project will create a method of recognition and validation of qualifications and competences for the profession of International Development Officer. Education professionals in schools and institutes engaged in international development have many good competences often acquired through non-formal and/or informal learning. The project seeks to make these competences visible by validation of qualifications for the profession.

- **Creating an integrated European model of competence based qualifications for IDOs**

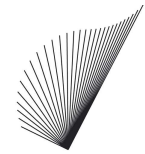
The IDOL project's priority is to create Qualifications for International Development Officer. Education professionals in charge of developing international cooperation at schools or institutes have almost always no official training/education for their task. However, they have acquired during their working life a lot of non-formal and/or informal learning. Our project will exchange experience and good practice on identification, assessment and recognition of this informal/n on-formal learning in cooperation with several European countries aiming at an integrated European solution.

- **Designing competence based tests**

The IDOL project will research into the standards for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Development and improvement of the standards will take place during the project's work on developing the qualifications for the new profession International Education Officer. The quality and credibility of the standards must be high and agreed upon in cooperation with several European countries. The work is of great importance since nowadays more and more informal and non-formal learning exists without proper validation.

- **Designing pilot training and piloting**

To test and guarantee that the work done is of high quality and credibility a pilot training will be designed. The training programme will be piloted for some 60 representatives of the target group in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, and the UK.



- **Dissemination and exploitation of the results**

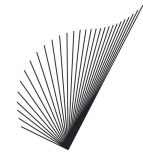
One of the main ideas behind the project's work is to create unity and integrated European solutions for the validation of informal and non-formal learning, particularly in the case of the new professionals, International Education Officers. Dissemination of the results is essentially important. Together with the dissemination and exploitation of the results, the project will give advice and suggestions on the improvement of guidance and counselling on validation of non-formal and informal learning

iii. Project team

IDOL is an international project with partners from 8 countries. The project partners are

- **Opetusalan koulutuskeskus, FINLAND**
- **AKOL Oy, FINLAND**
- **Centrul pentru Dezvoltare si Inovare in Educatie, ROMANIA**
- **Norton Radstock College, UNITED KINGDOM**
- **Opetushallitus, FINLAND**
- **Berufsbildungswerk des DGB GmbH, GERMANY**
- **Centre International d'Etudes Pedagogiques, FRANCE**
- **AÎNTEKA A.E. IDEC S.A., GREECE**
- **European Forum for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, BELGIUM**
- **CSCS – Centro Servizi “Cultura Sviluppo” Srl, ITALY**

Opetusalan koulutuskeskus is the Applicant organisation and the Coordinator of the project.



iv. Project period and budget

The project period of IDOL is 1/11/2008 - 31/10/2010. Agreed budget of the project is 493292,00 € and requested community grant 369969,00 € (75% of the agreed budget).

b. Evaluation process

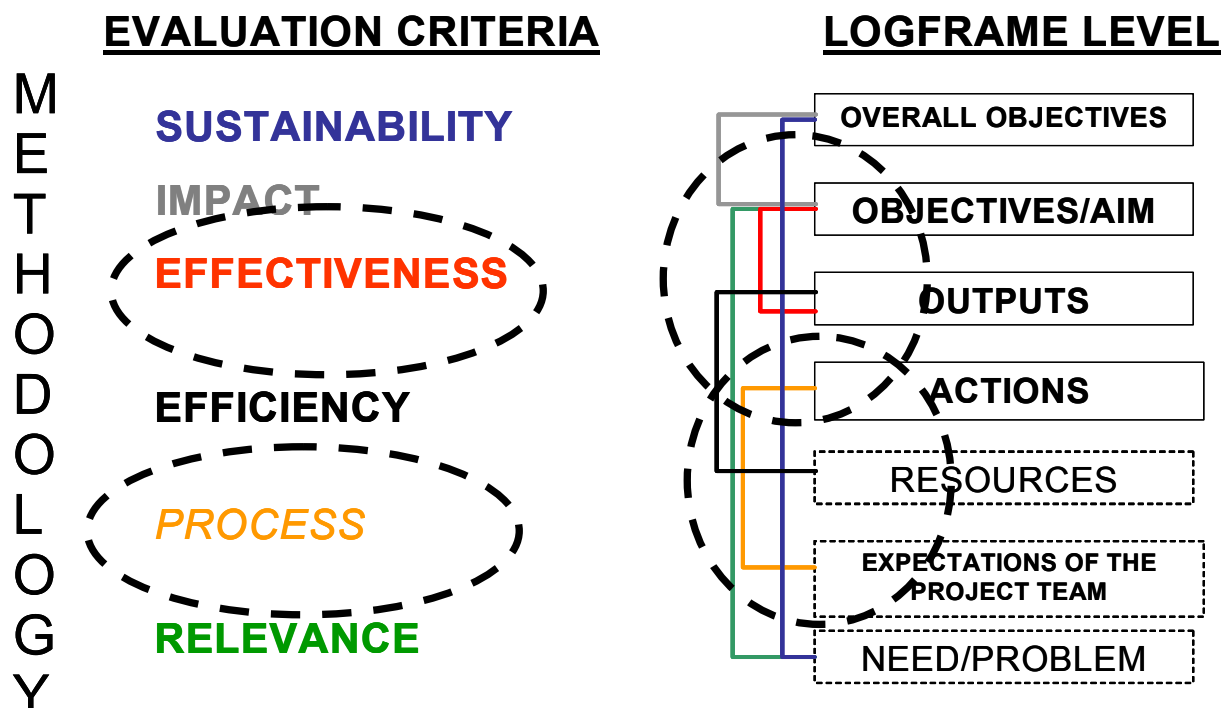
This study is a report of the external mid-term evaluation. It has been undertaken during autumn 2009. It is based on the tender launched at February 2009.

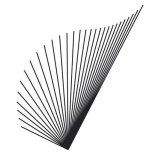
The external evaluation has been carried out by Finnish private owned company called Hanketaito Oy and its Managing Director, M.Soc.Sc (econ.) Mr. Harri Lappalainen has been the responsible person of the evaluation process.

i. Methodology

The main objective of this external evaluation process has been to provide information on the process of the project in order to assure the project become a learning process for the project team. Therefore the main evaluation criteria in this mid-term evaluation are **Process** and **Effectiveness** (see table 1).

Table 1: Evaluation methodology



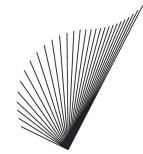


The criterion Process is outside of the classical LogFrame approach. However, it sets up a link between expectations partners had before the project and compares it to their experiences in the implementation phase. In addition, it gives an overview of partners' contribution. Therefore the evaluation has been formative; it has mainly been conducted for the benefit of the project coordinator and the project team. The focus was to help project partners to improve their daily operations in the development projects.

ii. Materials and tools

The main materials and tools used in the evaluation process are

- project application
- Interim reports
- minutes of the meetings
- Internet enquiry; targeted for the partners of the project. October 2009. N=10
- website of the project; <http://idolearn.net/>
- interviews of Project Coordinator and a partner responsible for the Quality Control



2. The evaluation

The key element of the evaluation process was the Internet enquiry which was launched at October 2009. It was targeted to all IDOL project partners in eight participating countries. Partners from seven countries replied so geographical coverage was very good. Altogether 10 of 18 participants submitted their answers after one reminder message.

In the inquiry there was also a division of tasks into separate themes:

- working on the project; participation, management, leadership and cooperation
- actions and outputs
- dissemination and effects

a. Working on the project; participation, management, leadership and cooperation

The project preparation was led by two Finnish partners (OPEKO and AKOL), and additionally, each partner was responsible to plan its own work package i.e. the work package in which a partner was expected to act as a leading partner. However, only two persons out of 10 in the inquiry were actively involved with the project planning.

Almost half of partners have earlier been working together in a project. Other partners found their way to this consortium through other way like EFVET network and invitation to participate this project.

Main reasons to participate IDOL project have been interesting project idea, developing methods and outputs. Some partners also mentioned internationalization as a key reason.

In the table 2.1 there is a gap analysis on partners opinions on the work carried out compared their opinions on the importance of each single theme to the success of the project. If the grade is above zero, it indicates that the project team has managed in that theme very well (so “Feeling on work done so far” gets higher grade than “Importance”). If the grade is below zero it means that they should have succeeded better in that theme. Original scale was - like in all other questions - from 1 to 5. Therefore grade in the gap analyses can vary between 4 and -4.

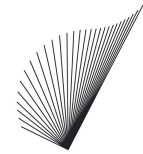
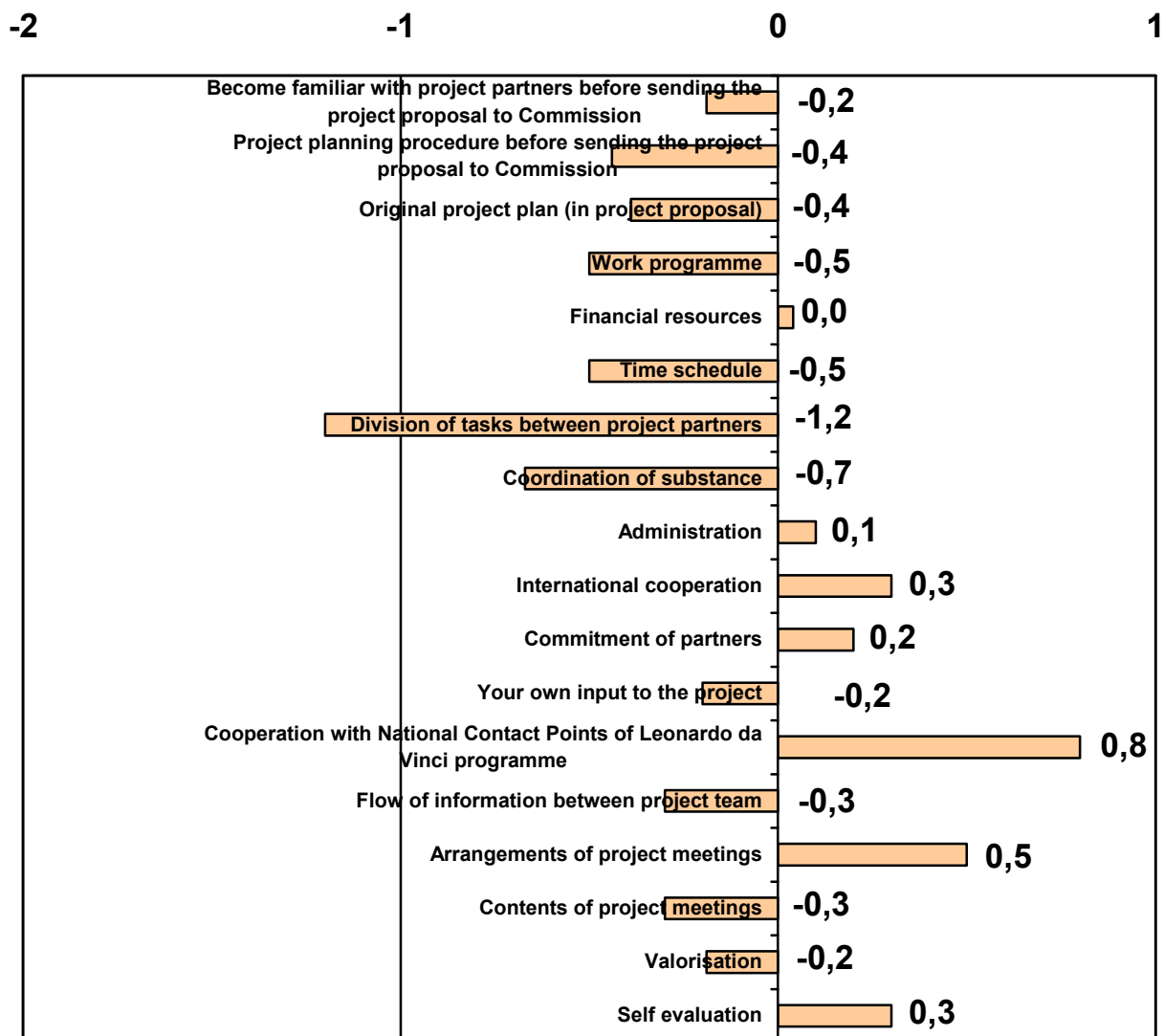


Table 2.1: Gap analyses on the “Importance” and “Feelings on work done so far”, according to project team (enquiry 2009, n=10)



It is easy to see that there are no major worries in the cooperation so far. Actually – compared to several other projects in the field of Training and Education – there are surprisingly many single themes where the success is very high (>0).

The only theme where the grade was under -1 is “Division of tasks between project partners”. There are 10 partner organisations in the project and division of responsibilities is very challenging. All 10 Work Packages (WP) are divided among partners and all partners are leading one WP. We can say that basic division of tasks is equal and all partners have a possibility to influence to the progress of the project.



In the inquiry there was a possibility to add own comments related to grades but there wasn't any remarkable additional info to this issue. Therefore project partners should discuss about this theme in the next partner meeting to find out needs and possibilities for fine tuning in the division of tasks.

Almost all partners see that they are very committed to this project and their input is high. In the inquiry there was a question "Which have been best experiences so far in the project?" Project partners gave several comments like "the great partnership and engagement of all partners". This phenomenon can also be seen in the gap analysis where the grade for "Commitment of partners" was positive. There are eight partner countries and one partner from each country; the only exception is Finland with three partners. Still nobody raised a question on Finland's possible overrepresentation.

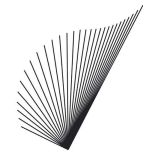
Partners from all countries were satisfied to the way project has organized project meetings. International team working got good feedback. The power of project meetings is significant; whether you can build up the spirit of the project or you can kill partners' enthusiasm. This project hasn't faced any significant problems in this theme. The only criticism was that minutes and actions from the transnational meetings should be produced more promptly after the meeting so everyone has a clear focus on what need to be done.

In EU funded projects administration is very often criticised for being too heavy and bureaucratic. In IDOL project all partners are experienced to operate in international project. Maybe that is the main reason why partners were not complaining that issue. Only one partner mentioned that reporting of the progress is too detailed and complicated.

Personnel changes in the project team always put a lot of additional pressure on timetables and on the internal cohesion of the project team. It is quite common that long lasting development projects face a lot of personnel changes because of the nature of project work. In this sense we can say that IDOL project team has so far been lucky to retain almost the original structure.

In projects funded by European Union's structural funds (for instance ESF; European Social Fund), every project is obliged to establish a Steering Committee. In projects funded directly by the Commission, the Committee issue is not instructed so clearly. However, in every project it is useful to have a group of experts for at least to get a "second opinion" in the most important strategic issues. IDOL project has an External Advisory Board, namely "EURORESO" which is an International Association with a scientific and educational purpose. These kinds of boards can generate added value for the substance of the project and EURORESO is likely to give a report of IDOL project's outcomes in the second part of the project. In addition to Advisory Board, a Steering Committee with members (Directors) from all partners could positively affect to the sustainability of the project.

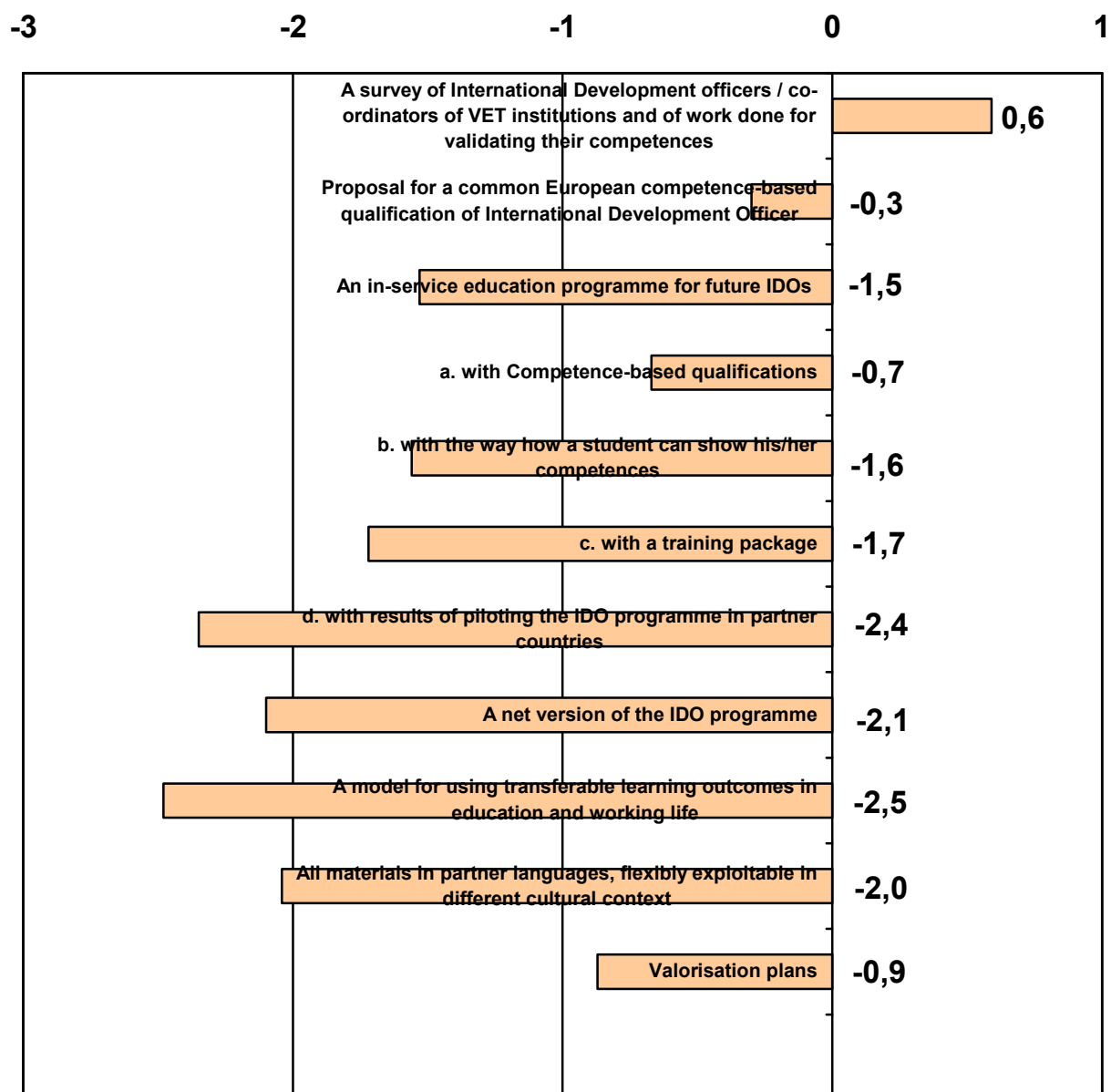
Although the item "Time Schedule" got minus grade in the gap analyses, IDOL project has managed to do most of its responsibilities and actions on time. Therefore it hasn't been necessary to make any major amendments to the original project plan.



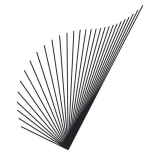
b. Outputs

We will look at the partners' opinions on team's success in developing and testing planned outputs.

Table 2.2: Gap analyses of the outputs of the project on "Importance" and "Present situation", according to project team (enquiry 2009, n=10)



As we can see, the output "A survey of International Development officers/coordinators of VET institutions and of work done for validating their competences" has been accomplished and there is a synthesis report as well as country reports already available. All other outputs are still in progress.

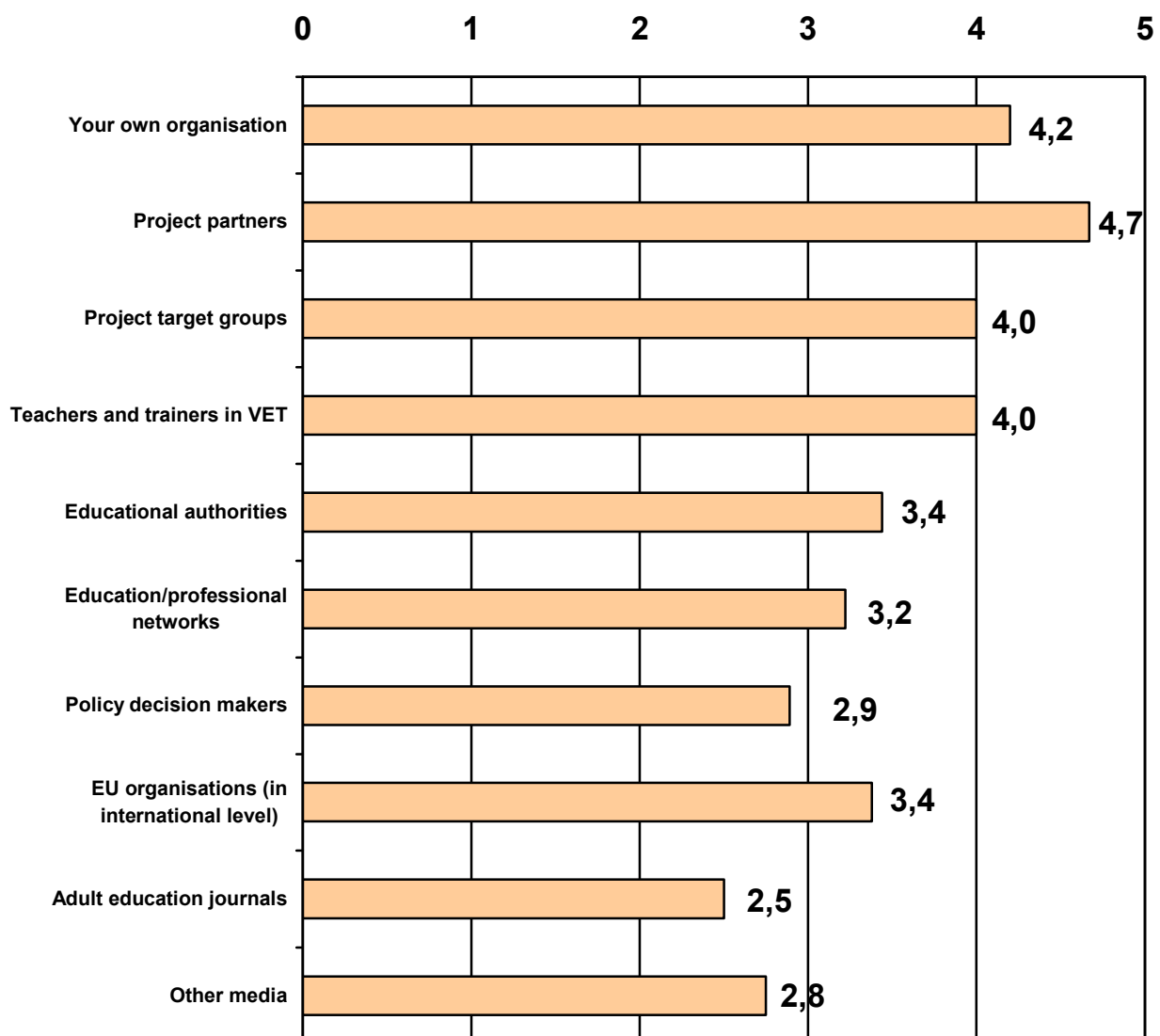


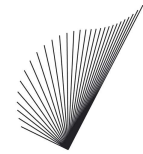
Project partners are extremely confident that all planned outputs will be finalised before project ends. The gap analysis is at least very encouraging: according to the project team their success will be greater than the importance in all outputs of the project. This tells us that IDOL project is going to produce all outputs mentioned in the original project plan and no major preference has been given to any single output. The average of “Expected value for success” varied in the scale 1-5 between 4,2 (“All materials are in partner languages, flexibly exploitable in different cultural context”) and 5. The overall average of all outputs were as high as 4,8.

There are no other deliverables (not mentioned in project plan) expected from the project.

c. Valorisation

Table 2.3.; Cooperation with stakeholders, according to project team (enquiry 2009, n=10)





Project partners have actively been participating national level seminars and conferences and testing the idea of International Development Officer's degree and competence-based qualifications. Feedback has been very positive and there really seems to be a huge need for the degree and also for the education programme of IDOs.

IDOL project has a public website www.idolearn.net. It serves people who want to find some basic data of the project, like IDOL partners and objectives of the project. There are also some useful web links for IDOs. However, that portal should be better utilised: for example in the development section the page "News and updates" is still blank without any information (November 2009). There is also an Open Discussion Forum. Just like in hundreds of cases before, it hasn't been successful.

IDOL project has so far targeted quite well teachers and trainers in Education and Training sector, e.g. by a survey. When dealing with accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, national policy decision makers should be involved or at least actively contacted during the project. This is a crucial factor for the final success, credibility and sustainability and of the project. We have to bear in mind that for example in Finland Educational authorities are represented already in the IDOL project consortium. Still project must tighten its grasp and more actively work with national policy decision makers.

d. Fulfilment of original aims

That "success story" phenomenon can also be seen in the inquiry in the separate question "How well is the project – at the end of the project - going to fulfil its planned aims" (table 2.4.). All those answers are fully in line with outlooks presented in the table 2.2.

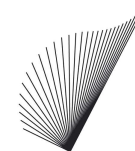
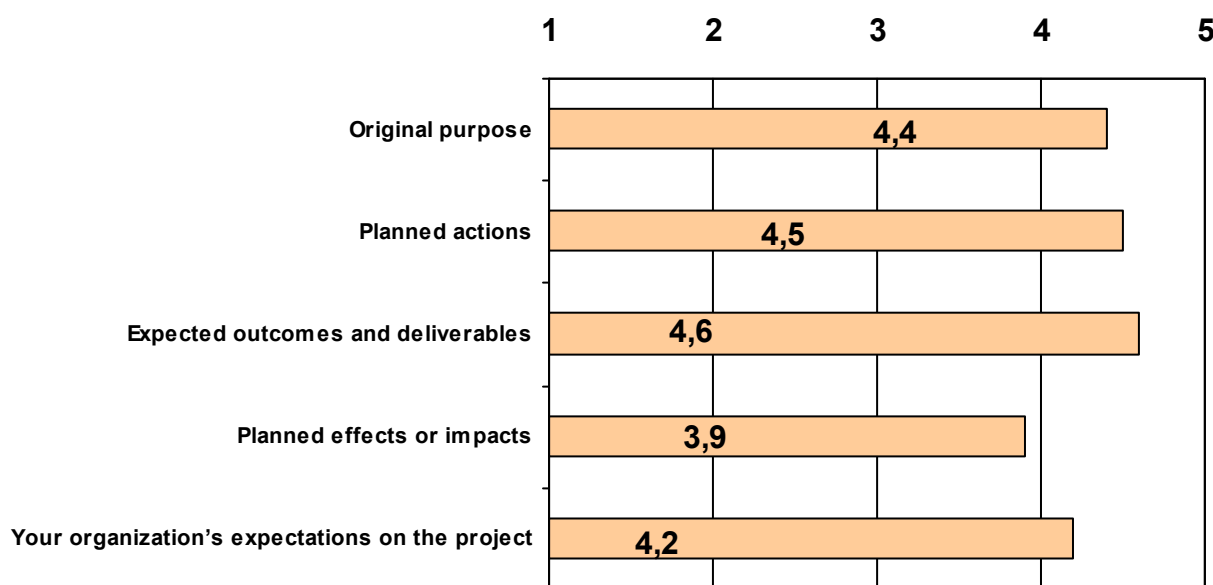
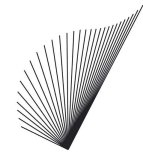


Table 2.4: “What is your opinion at the moment on projects success: how well is the project – at the end of the project - going to fulfil its aims” (enquiry targeted to the IDOL project team 2009, n=10)



There weren't any general worries that more than three partners mentioned in the inquiry. However, a couple of issues need to be taken up. Creating a common understanding of “Competence-based Qualification” has been challenging because all partners hasn't been familiar with that issue before this project. Also different educational systems in different countries and especially differences in the further education for teachers have caused some misunderstandings. Within the project the discussion is also too often focused only on teachers though there are other relevant professions within Education and Training sector.

The budget per partner isn't very remarkable mostly because of relatively high number of partners and rules of the LLP. However, partners are not worried about financial resources of the project. Some partners still would like to see some grant allocated also for “Other costs”. This issue should be taken into next IDOL project meeting's agenda.



3. Summary of conclusions and recommendations

Under this paragraph there are presented main conclusions and recommendations made in the paragraph 2.

- The IDOL project consortium is extremely experienced and wide with representatives from eight countries
- Partners are mostly satisfied on the internal development process (coordination, cooperation, administration) of the project
- Project partners are really confident that all planned outputs will be finalised before project ends. Most of outputs are still in development phase
- The process of the project has been quite much alike planned. Partners have been mostly very well committed to the project work. Most of actions have taken place on time and no major amendments to the project period has been made
- Division of tasks between partners has not satisfied all partners. This issue should be taken into project meeting's agenda for possible fine tuning
- Website of the project is functional but it hasn't yet been a great success. For effective valorisation, it is important that all on-line courses and other relevant materials produced by the project will be available on the IDOLearn e-learning platform as soon as possible
- More actions for involving national policy decision makers are expected in the second year of the project
- There isn't International Steering Committee with participants (Directors) from each partner organization. It would generate added value for the cooperation after the project period