



# Pilot Project on Quality Assurance of Non-Formal Education

## REPORT

## 1. Introduction

Life long learning (LLL) is increasingly important in the 21st century knowledge society. The lifelong learning paradigm is based on the supposed complementarities of formal, non-formal and informal learning of the individual throughout his/her life. Nevertheless, the three educational fields are generally not yet widely recognised as equally valid and important educational providers. Furthermore cooperation between the different fields is still limited and the 'flexible LLL pathways' still are rather a dream than reality.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ), representing youth in Europe, sees youth NGOs as a major provider of non-formal education (NFE) and wants to further the recognition of NFE and of youth organisations as providers of quality non-formal education. That the recognition has not been sufficiently achieved is in part due to a lack of confidence in the quality of NFE within society and within youth organisations themselves. The YFJ believes that youth organisations can further the recognition of NFE by clearly ensuring the quality of NFE through the setting up and implementation of a framework to assure and communicate this quality.

## 2. The proposed Quality Assurance of NFE

In the Policy Paper on Quality Assurance of NFE of 2008, the YFJ proposes a Quality Assurance Framework based on a solid understanding of quality and coming from the specific reality of NFE as provided by youth organisations.

The Policy Paper provides a comprehensive set of concepts based on the cornerstone definition: The quality of NFE in youth NGOs is the degree to which selected needs of society and of learners are reached and addressed. Based on this definition Quality Assurance (QA) is the process designed with a dual purpose: of improving quality and of communicating clearly with stakeholders about it. The definition further differentiates between needs of learners and of society and proposes different approaches for both. The understanding of quality and of the needs that NFE wants to address, form the basis for the proposed QA Framework which is an agreement between all stakeholders in a certain field on how quality assurance in the NFE field will be organised. This Framework, consisting of an internal QA process, an external QA component and a set of Quality Indicators should be formalised by all stakeholders in a common Charter. The YFJ proposes to base the external component of QA on the innovative concept of 'Peer Feedback'.

The initial list of indicators from the Policy Paper:

### Resources/coordination

- The necessary resources are available
- Resources are used in a sustainable way

### Educators

- Educators are prepared
- Educators are able to adapt to changing situations

### Content

- The needs of the target group are translated into NFE
- The mission and values of the organisation or group are translated into NFE

### Learning process

- The methodology selected is suitable for the learning process
- Learners influence their learning process.
- The learning process and its results are reflected upon
- The NFE programme is designed within a long-term perspective

## 3. The project

The policy paper outlined the proposed QA procedures and mechanisms which were based on QA processes in other fields and the experience of several youth organisations that have developed QA mechanisms. The YFJ proposal is meant for the whole European field and is ground-breaking as nothing similar has been attempted in this field. Therefore it was decided to run a pilot project to test the different processes and assess their usefulness and their efficiency. This should lead to an updated proposal for a QA scheme.

### **3.1 Objectives**

The two main and interlinked goals of this project are to develop a Quality Assurance process that works in practice and develop capacity within the Member Organisations on Quality Assurance.

#### **Objectives**

- 1. To increase the capacity and willingness of youth organisations to work on Quality Assurance of NFE;
- 2. To test the theoretical model of QA of the policy Paper and further refine it to a version that works in practice.
- 3. To increase recognition of NFE and of youth organisation as serious providers of it among stakeholders.

### **3.2 Participating organisations**

After an open call and a selection procedure, 6 Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum have been selected to take part in the pilot project. They were selected for their expertise in NFE and/or Quality Assurance and to represent the diversity of the Membership of the YFJ.

#### **AEGEE: European Students Forum: [www.aegee.org](http://www.aegee.org)**

AEGEE (Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe / European Students' Forum) is a student organisation that promotes cooperation, communication and integration amongst young people in Europe. As a non-governmental, politically independent and non-profit organisation AEGEE is open to students and young people from all faculties and disciplines – today it counts 13.000 members, active in more than 200 university cities in 40 European countries, making it the biggest interdisciplinary student association in Europe. The Main Fields of Action of AEGEE are Active Citizenship, Cultural Exchange, Higher Education and Peace & Stability.

#### **EFIL: European Federation for Intercultural Learning: [efil.afs.org](http://efil.afs.org)**

EFIL, the European Federation for Intercultural Learning, is the umbrella organisation of AFS organisations in Europe. AFS is a network of exchange organisations in over 55 countries worldwide. With the help of a large network of volunteers they organise short- and long-term intercultural stays for over 12.000

### 3. The project

young people every year. EFIL supports its 20 European national AFS organisations by promoting synergies and opportunities in the fields of intercultural learning and global education. EFIL was established as an international, non-governmental organisation in 1971. Its original purpose was to co-ordinate existing programmes and to establish contacts and programmes in countries not yet involved in the network. Over the past 4 decades, EFIL's scope has become much wider. EFIL is now more than a federation; it's a partnership, a grouping of organisations committed to stand up for their common interest: providing intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

#### **YEU- Youth for Exchange and Understanding: [www.yeu-international.org](http://www.yeu-international.org)**

Youth for Exchange and Understanding works to promote peace, understanding and co-operation between the young people of the world, in a spirit of respect for human rights. YEU aims to realise youth activities to foster closer co-operation and better understanding among the young people of the world, both between and within continents, particularly by encouraging the exchange of information, ideas and opinions;

#### **WAGGGS: World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts : [www.wagggsworld.org](http://www.wagggsworld.org)**

With ten million Girl Guides and Girl Scouts from 145 countries across the world, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is the largest voluntary movement dedicated to girls and young women in the world. The World Association supports girls and young women to develop their full potential as responsible citizens of the world. WAGGGS focuses on leadership development and active citizenship. These are delivered through innovative global education and community and advocacy programmes. WAGGGS delivers a well-established, unique values-based approach to non-formal learning, that is international and intergenerational, enabling girls and young women to develop life and leadership skills through self-development, challenge and adventure. The Europe Region of WAGGGS participated in this project.

#### **VJR: Flemish Youth Council: [www.vlaamsejeugdraad.be](http://www.vlaamsejeugdraad.be)**

The Flemish Youth Council is the official advisory body of the Flemish Government on all matters concerning children and young people and their organizations. This means that all Flemish Ministers have to ask the Flemish Youth Council for advice whenever they want to make a decision that will have consequences for children and young people. If

### 3. The project

policy makers forget to ask for advice or when they deem it necessary, the Flemish Youth Council can give give advice of its own accord.,

**LIJOT: Lithuanian Youth Council :  
www.lijot.lt**

Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT) – is the biggest non-governmental, non-profit umbrella structure for Lithuanian national youth organizations and regional unions of youth organizations. LiJOT has 62 members (non-governmental youth organisations), that means more than 200 000 young people in all Lithuania.

**3.3 The Kick off**

The pilot project started in November 2009 with a Kick Off Meeting in Brussels. The 6 participating organisations met in Brussels to receive a short training on QA of NFE and to discuss the implementation of the project.

After the meeting all the organisations selected one of their scheduled projects. This project would be ‘quality assured’ i.e. the organisations tried out the internal QA system, developed the indicators and prepared a report for the Peer Feedback session. The first step was to operationalise the indicators. The organisations described concretely what the indicators meant for this project. The organisations each did this in their own way as the project aimed to let the practice grow from the reality of the organisations. An example of an operationalised indicator :

1	The necessary resources are available	
Operationalisation :	It was felt that this indicator could refer to different parts of the project planning cycle, but was further refined to identify the different kinds of resources being used to organize and implement the activity. We also felt it was useful to include a quantitative measurement as well as indicators which were qualitative	
Phase(s):	The sub-indicators below were applied to the design and implementation parts of the process	
Sub indicators created:	1. The participation fee enabled participants coming from all socio-economic backgrounds to take part in the event 2. Planning team members with the necessary skills and competences were identified and recruited 3. There was a fair allocation of tasks within the planning team to enable each team member to make an effective contribution to the event 4. 75% of the participants felt that the accommodation met their needs during the event	3 3 3,4 4

### 3. The project

The operationalised indicators were sent to the other organisations for feedback and clarification.

In march 2010 the organisations met for a midterm meeting to discuss progress and obstacles. Due to different year planning in the 6 organisations some had already finished their project while other still had to determine their project.

During the summer of 2010 all organisations finalised their projects and the internal QA process.

#### **3.4 Peer feedback meeting**

The peer feedback process started with all organisations filling in the short QA report form and sending it to their 'peers' (in this case the other participating organisations). The report form included an overview of the project, the indicators and lessons learned. This allowed for clarification questions to be sent and answered through email. The meeting had a session per organisation where the organisation would present:

- The strong points of the project
- Challenges
- How to improve the QA process

The peers discussed their view of the strong points, gave suggestions how to tackle the challenges and finally reviewed the QA process.

This was summarised in an assessment per project of which below is an example:

1. Strong points of the project:
  - The expectations of participants were met.
  - Good logistical support.
  - Strong learning experience of the trainers.
  - High level of ownership and motivation from the organisation team.
2. Challenges:
  - Not enough volunteers/HR.
  - The involvement of the participants was not high.
  - Miscommunication, not so clearer roles and delegation of tasks.
  - Lack of knowledge and experience of some trainers in the topic (European Citizenship).
3. How to improve the QA process:
  - Using methodologies through which the participants will play the key role when the trainers can step-back (for example simulations) to try everyone to be involved from one side and to release the pressure on the HR from other side.
  - Better programme planning with more time for trainers to share between each-other.
  - Next time there will be a person only for clearer communication and evaluation. This person will deal with the needs, but will not use the exact QA form.
  - To have a prep training with the trainers on European Citizenship with an expert.
4. Additional remarks:
  - Some of the indicators and sub-indicators are really difficult to measure because they are reflecting on knowledge and skills that develop later on after the event.

## 3. The project

### **3.5 The wrap up**

The participants met once more in November 2010 to wrap up the project, evaluate the outcomes and propose suggestions for updating the policy paper and how to take the implementation further.

### **3.5 Advisory Board**

The YFJ decided to set up an Advisory Board to provide expertise for the project by supporting the work of the NFE-QA project team. The advisory board should ensure a strong link between the project, policy work and research and allow expertise from other fields to improve this project and further to valorise the outcomes of this project. By bringing together the key stakeholders it can serve as the first phase of the possible setting up of a QA network for NFE.

The advisory board met in december 2009 during the 4<sup>th</sup> Dialogue on the recognition of NFE in Ghent. The advisory board provided feedback on the concepts and it generally felt that the NFE-QA process was designed well. The advisory board was insufficiently used after the first meeting due to the different timelines of the participating organisations and the lack of finished products to ask feedback on. The involvement of the advisory board was decreased further to ensure that the six organisations had a safe environment and could freely discuss among peers. This is a missed opportunity within the project and the YFJ plans to invite the Advisory Board to give feedback on the results of the project and the proposal for follow up.

## 4. Outcomes of the project

The project produced several outcomes:

- First and most importantly, six YFJ Member Organisations and the YFJ have an increased understanding of QA in NFE and capacity to work with it.
- Secondly, the project led to a proposal for updating the policy paper on NFE-QA which has been transmitted to the YFJ board
- Third the project led to the development of pedagogical tools that should facilitate Youth organisations working with QA and peer-feedback.
- Fourthly, the project has been discussed with several partners and institutions leading to an increased recognition of NFE and, in the YFJ opinion, an increased awareness of the quality of NFE. Although there is no clear measurement for this objective.

## 5. The proposed update for the Policy Paper

### **5.1 The updated QA processes :**

The quality cycle proposed should be clarified and the different phases should not be seen as completely separate and consecutively. The phases themselves should be rephrased as:

- Needs analysis
- Setting objectives
- Design
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Peer-feedback

Evaluation should also be understood to not only be a phase in itself but a constant part of all phases and the change following from the evaluation is not a phase in itself but an element of all the next project cycles.

In general the organisations did not have problems linking the proposed NFEQA framework to their own QA system as for most their internal QA procedures are 'common practice'.

### **5.2 The peer-feedback method :**

The peer-feedback method (strong points, challenges, learning points for QA process) worked well but could have been deeper. Having a clearer structure before should improve the process. This is a matter of implementation so no need to revise the policy paper. The peer-feedback method should be described in more detail in an explanatory support document such as the foreseen NFE-QA manual together with guidance on how to develop the sub indicators.

### **5.3 The Quality Assurance standards**

The peers should provide peer-feedback but also judge whether the organisation complies with the 3 QA standards and whether it is sufficiently serious about its QA.

This is a difficult and sensitive exercise which the pilot project did not do. This process was discussed and there are a lot of questions to be answered:

- Will the project be awarded with quality or the organisation?
- How many activities should be peer-reviewed before an organisation is deemed Quality Assured?
- What if some organisations don't keep their QA procedures?
- Are the peer evaluators individuals or organisations? And should there be an assessment by a neutral agency?

The YFJ members indicated a clear direction for the policy paper and NFE-QA. It should be peers reviewing, not an external agency and it should focus in first instance on NFE schemes (programmes/projects) as youth organisations do more than NFE (participation, leisure time, representation etc). Therefore the Framework will not provide the label: 'quality organisation' but 'provider of quality assured NFE'.

## 5. The proposed update for the Policy Paper

### 5.4 Indicators

- 1. The assessed needs of learners & society and the mission & values of the organisation, are translated into objectives.
- 2. The objectives are reflected in the NFE scheme.
- 3. The educational methodology selected is suitable for the learning process.
- 4. The necessary resources are available.
- 5. Resources are used in a sustainable, cost effective and responsible way.
- 6. Educators (such as trainers/ volunteers/facilitators etc) have the necessary competences.
- 7. Educators are prepared.
- 8. The communication is managed effectively.
- 9. Learners influence their learning process .
- 10. Learners understand their learning outcomes and can transfer them.
- 11. All actors are involved in the continuous evaluation process.

### 5.5 Evaluation of the project

The project had 3 objectives :

Objectives :

- To increase the capacity and willingness of youth organisations to work on Quality Assurance of NFE;
- To test the theoretical model of QA of the policy Paper and further refine it to a version that works in practice.
- To increase recognition of NFE and of youth organisations as serious providers of it among stakeholders.

The first objective has been met for the participating organisations who indicated that it improved their work and brought new insights to their work. They are better capable of doing QA now.

The second objective has been met as the model in general works in the reality of YFJ MOs. Several issues have been clarified and guidance documents developed. Other issues remain to be tested and tried out.

The third objective is hard to assess whether it has been reached. With it being presented to several institutions and on several conferences, it received very positive feedback for its solidity. This however is a very limited group and NFE-QA is far from being a recognised process or practice.

## 6. Conclusion

### **1. Conclusion**

The conclusion from the pilot project is that the methodology as proposed and as developed during the project works. The development of the NFE-QA scheme should be continued and go into the next phase: developing of a network on NFE-QA.

This network should function as a support agency for youth organisation wishing to work with QA for their NFE programmes, it should bring those organisations together for peer-feedback and it should build the understanding and the support of the stakeholders for this scheme of NFE-QA.