Stakeholder consultation: criteria and indicators of a quality framework for Learning Regions

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APPLYING QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA PROPOSED BY R3L+ PROJECT TO LEARNING REGIONS/CITIES PARTNERSHIPS/NETWORKS			
A. QUALITY AREA: PARTNERSHIP			
CORE QUALITY CRITERIA *Main aspects important for quality assurance in the case of a specific quality area (i.e. partnership)*	*QUALITY INDICATORS (CORE AND ADDITIONAL/ DESCRIPTORS)* *What you might look for to establish if and to what degree the quality criteria is address/achieved.*	*METHODS, APPROACHES AND TOOLS FOR PRODUCING/USINGQUALITY INDICATORS* *How you might go about getting information or feedback for calculating the quality indicators?*	*CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING/ USING QUALITY INDICATORS* *What difficulties/barriers you foresee in following this quality criteria ? (i.e. collecting information/feedback from network partners)*
o Common vision, mission and overall aims of the partnership/network explicitly defined and understood	o Clear public expression of purpose and actions o Statements of positive affiliation by key stakeholder member o Stakeholder consensus in key decisions about direction and focus	o Media Analysis for Learning region purpose o Review of Steering Group meeting records o Key stakeholder interviews	o Organisations can offer statements of support for the network without fully embracing the vision. o Differences in concepts (meanings and definitions) can exist between stakeholder organisations
o Specific objectives and quantifiable targets specified and understood	o There is a plan o There are Targets o Targets are within a time frame Distinctions made between outputs (short-term targets) and outcomes (longer-term targets)	o Review written documentation	o Targets can be about aspirations or more abstract: therefore outcomes more difficult to measure.

o Principles and protocols to govern ongoing collaboration developed and understood	o Procedures in place to ensure full and equal participation in central learning city meetings, as well as in sub-groups established o Rules or guidelines developed to influence stakeholder interactions outside meetings (ongoing) o These include the general public as stakeholders in the learning region (not just agencies)	o Review of documentation o Surveys/interviews to establish changes in patterns of agency interaction	o Collaboration may be understood by only one single representative (not shared by frontline staff in participating agencies)
o Partnership is 'deep' (not just one person if representative of a network partner) o BUT also 'deep' if at personal level the participants bring/shere all experience and competences they have	o Agencies participate in sub-structures of the Learning Regions (working groups etc as well as Steering Group Meetings) o Cross section of participant agencies are involved (not all management and not all front-line staff) o Partners are open at meetings to share learning	o Review membership of central and sub-groups by agency or stakeholder o Analysis of stakeholder contributions to meeting and discussions o Analysis of stakeholder contributions to actions	o Agencies can be defensive: reluctant to share all information because of competitive situation
o Individual partner can communicate back to their partnership organisation (non-conflictual)	o Consistency between official agency positions and individual agency representative positions re	o Review of stakeholder agency development plans o Interviews with personnel in various functional areas	o

	learning region involvement o The Learning Region concept has permeated different levels of participant agency actions and policies o The Learning Region is acknowledged in constituent agency development plans o There is a turnover in representation (the same person does not represent the same agency for years!) o New representatives of agencies understand the context when joining		
o Partnership is proactive (participative not representative)	o Strong leadership exists; but o Taking initiative is not confined to a few individuals. o Rules are not too rigid as to stifle or block innovation o Taking the initiative is encouraged at meetings	o Analysis of decision-making: reviewing network decisions to identify range of involvement and proactively	o Participants may (very narrowly) judge their levels of participation and contribution just by attendance at meetings
o Engagement is voluntary, not enforced	o Agencies choose representatives with understanding of learning regions.	o Interviews with those responsible for appointments to steering group o Analysis of contribution to discussion for steering group	o

	o Agencies brief representatives	members	
o Partnership is valued (time is paid for)	o Remuneration of expenses for those investing time voluntarily (not as part of their paid employment) o Equality in remuneration between paid and voluntary stakeholders	o Analysis of protocols and procedures re remuneration.	o Sometimes costs are hidden
o Partners show leadership	o Stakeholders proactive in engaging other stakeholders o Peer learning is encouraged	o Audit of actions taken independently (without being 'forced')	o Stakeholder organisations can be represented by levels without autonomy to take decisions or show leadership
o Basis of partnership can be reviewed (changing to suit needs and challenges as they arise)	o Stakeholder organisations review their involvement in learning region periodically. o Stakeholder organisations change representative and involvement basis	o Assessment of key stakeholder agency review and evaluation process	o
o Partners are kept motivated – ensuring network agenda matches partner expectations – is value-added	o Partners acknowledge added benefit of learning region involvement o Partners prioritise learning region involvement in their own strategic plans	o Audit of key partners strategic plans to assess priority accorded to learning region o Audit of resources committed	o Priority accorded may be in nominal terms only (resource as well as verbal commitments need to be checked)
o Consistency – language, concepts clearly	o Publications and releases are targeted (to suit	o Check for misunderstandings	o

understood to facilitate partnership	different audiences) o Partners open to change the way they communicate to accommodate broad understanding		
o Coverage: all necessary partners are involved to address needs	o Partnership involvement reflects needs and challenges identified (community involvement) o Partnership involvement reflects responses required to needs (services and policy making involvement)	o Check breadth of involvement against breadth of strategic goals	o Involvement check needs to be at action level (as well as just representative level) o Involvement should be at policy-making as well as service delivery levels
o Partners understand their own role (responsibilities) and the connections they need to make	o Clear brief or 'job description' exists for each central stakeholder o Partners understand these	o Partners interviews	o Understanding of role may be restricted to one representative
o Flexibility: partnership arrangements are not too rigid as to impede responsiveness	o New structures are established as new challenges and opportunities are identified o New structures involve new people	o Audit of structures and procedures established (including rationale for these)	o
o Trust and openness amongst partners exist (even within competitive conditions)	o Partners are willing to share information, experiences and views o Protocols in place to allow open sharing of information	o Tracking of information sharing and access as LR initiative progresses o Ensure openness extends to community (NGO) as well as statutory sector	o Competitive relations amongst partners can be very real (especially in accessing ongoing state funding)

o There is Ownership: autonomy as well as sense of responsibility	o Partners promote the Learning region strategy o Partners demonstrate benefits	o Analysis of public awareness (media etc) initiatives o Analysis of networking undertaken for the purposes of promoting the LR initiative	o Need to ensure that promotion or ownership is not restricted to a few central partners

B. QUALITY AREA: PARTICIPATION

CORE QUALITY CRITERIA *Main aspects important for quality assurance in the case of a specific quality area (i.e. partnership)*	QUALITY INDICATORS (CORE AND ADDITIONAL/ DESCRIPTORS) *Establish if and to what degree the quality criteria is address/achieved.*	METHODS, APPROACHES AND TOOLS FOR PRODUCING/USINGQUALITY INDICATORS *How you might go about getting information or feedback for calculating the quality indicators?*	CONSTRAINTS AND CHHALLENGES IN PRODUCING/ USING QUALITY INDICATORS *What difficulties/barriers you foresee in following this quality criteria (i.e. collecting information/feedback from network partners)?*
o Involving the wider public or community	o LR initiatives are open and not exclusive o Initiatives are advertised widely o Proactive attempts are made to involve the more excluded o Language, materials, resources, published materials are clearly understood in everyday life: not just at overall network level, but also in constituent activities and programmes o Understanding of learning needs to be universally relevant and meaningful to all	o Local media audit o Audit of outreach and awareness-building actions	o Language used or ways of describing learning may not be accessible to all stakeholders (Literacy can be a barrier)

	life-styles		
o Network is known and understood by general public	o Perception of the initiative is not restricted to academic or formal learning o Initiatives make their way into the popular media o People can identify personal opportunities as a result	o Media audit o Web site accesses	o
o Clear measures to involve those most distant from learning opportunities	o Outreach efforts are made (not just 'supply') o Those most in need are named o Co-operation exists with organisations working with the most disadvantaged o Cost is not a barrier to participation in events and initiatives o Beneficiaries have a chance to express their needs o Beneficiaries are involved in decision-making (governance) o Beneficiaries are involved in review of network interventions o Beneficiaries are actively supported (and opportunities created) to express needs, be involved in decision-making and review	o Review strategy actions for balance between delivery and outreach o Assess extent to which outreach is targeted o Analysis of participation in LR-sponsored activities by social class	o All this relates to how language and communication are organised

C. QUALITY AREA: PROGRESS AND RENEWAL

CORE QUALITY CRITERIA *Main aspects important for quality assurance in the case of a specific quality area (i.e. partnership)*	*QUALITY INDICATORS (CORE AND ADDITIONAL/ DESCRIPTORS)* *Establish if and to what degree the quality criteria is address/achieved.*	*METHODS, APPROACHES AND TOOLS FOR PRODUCING/USINGQUALITY INDICATORS* *How you might go about getting information or feedback for calculating the quality indicators?*	*CONSTRAINTS AND CHHALLENGES IN PRODUCING/ USING QUALITY INDICATORS* *What difficulties/barriers you foresee in following this quality criteria ? (i.e. collecting information/feedback from network partners)*
o The capacity to continuously understand results, reasons; and the capacity to use this understanding to influence ongoing planning	o There is a formal process agreed around evaluation. o Indicators are agreed o Evaluation and review addresses product (outcomes) as well as process (lessons) o Results of evaluation and review are fed into planning of LR actions and approaches	o Review LR strategy re evaluation approach, process and indicators o Review revisions of LR plan to identify if informed by evaluation and review results	o Process may be agreed, but not implemented
o Partners 'internalise' evaluation and review (identifying benefits and not just an imposition)	o Results from LR review are taken on board by key stakeholders o Engagement in review is proactive	o Audit of key stakeholder plans (to identify of lessons from LR involvement are being incorporated)	o Evaluation and review can be seen as fulfilling a requirement – for another party – and not of self-benefit
o Evaluation and review	o Learning region partners are	o Stakeholder interviews	o There can be a resistance to

(quality) are prioritised – seen as a core activity and not just an add-on	prepared to learn from results of their own actions		document or record instances where planned actions do not work – even though learning from these is important
o Resources are allocated (not just finance but human responsibility)	o Resources committed to review o Key stakeholders ensure personnel time committed to review	o Audit of resource commitments (proportion committed to review)	o Stakeholders may commit all resources in financial terms (eg commissioning external evaluation) and neglect internal, ongoing evaluation
o Methods and mechanisms should not be cumbersome or divert from the main purpose of the network.	o Key stakeholders acknowledge benefits from review, in relation to time invested o Key stakeholders see indicators as being relevant and are capable of easily applying them	o Estimate time committed to review as proportion of overall strategy time o Ask central stakeholders about 'cost-benefit' of review and evaluation	o Indicators can be seen as irrelevant and difficult to complete
o Means of measuring must be appropriate in context of learning region (not just quantitative; and also longer-term)	o Possible outcomes should include effects on broader community (not just the individual) o Possible outcomes should be also seen as longer term (effective LR strategies may take generations for positive results – not immediate) o Methods are in place to record social, cultural and behavioural improvements (not just economic	o Review of LR evaluation framework and methodology	o The fist tendency my be to use numbers to measure success, since these are the least difficult to apply.

	benefits that can be easily quantified) o There is a macro as well as micro picture (product as well as process)		
o Results and findings must be able to be widely understood	o Evaluation and review results are made widely available o Results are stakeholder-specific	o Consult community-based stakeholders to check understanding	o Academic terminology can act as a barrier to understanding and engagement
o Flexibility of partners to share information (not defensive)	o Covered in Section A	o	o
o Flexibility and openness of partners to accept results (failures as well as successes) and act on results – open to change	o Covered in Section A	o	o
o Benefits identified are broad-based (not just education-linked)	o Results and benefits of LR Initiative are taken into account for social relations, employment strategy, cultural development, health and well-being etc. o Links between all these dimensions (as to the value of learning) are understood and demonstrated	o Review of reports produced by LR as a result of reviewing activities. o Review broader regional development strategies to determine influence of LR strategy	o Difficulties can arise in taking the broader view if central stakeholders are from one sector (eg formal education)
o Outcomes and impact is regularly	o Evaluation is built-in at all levels o Evaluation results	o Audit of dissemination strategy o Interviews with stakeholders	o

checked, demonstrated and communicated to all members of the network	are made openly available o Partners review changes in their operational environment (external challenges) as well as results of their own actions		
o Results and learning is used to influence policy (not just practice)	o Lessons emerging from LR experience are taken up by mainstream policy makers in different sectors o Policies of mainstream services change as a result	o Review of policy shifts linked to LR experiences o Talk to policy makers in the region	o Making direct causal links is often difficult, and sometimes need to rely on informed speculation
o Unintended as well as planned outcomes are documented and shared	o Evaluation and review are devolved to the lowest possible level – action 'on the ground' o Members of the community have the option to respond in an open-ended way o Not all outcomes are pre-determined	o Review of LR outcome indicators o Audit of community-based LR actions to determine that evaluation is built-in and allows for participant feedback	o