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Quality standards
in education and training activities
of the Directorate of Youth and Sport
of the Council of Europe

Prepared by the Education and Training Unit



INTRODUCTION

Quality in training and education is about *minimum* standards and definitions related to the essence or type of activities. It refers to what should be in certain activities and also relates to how they are prepared, delivered and evaluated.

Quality standards in education and training activities of the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport (hereafter DYS) should serve as an assurance to all partners involved and concerned (organisers, promoters, trainers, participants, sending organisations), that the stated aims and objectives of a given activity are adequately defined and will be pursued so as to be made fully achievable.

Quality concerns the whole spectrum of context, partners, people, methods and stages of the activity or project. It is defined implicitly or explicitly, but a *minimum common understanding* of what it entails has to be secured, the minimum being the quality standards referred to in this document.

It should be born in mind that the notion of quality is socially, institutionally and culturally marked and, therefore, not always understood by all partners in the same way. As the education and training activities of the Council of Europe are not value-neutral, the understanding and practice of quality standards must take this factor into account too.

Many of the quality standards described below may be difficult to measure in the short or even medium term; however, this does not mean that they cannot be evaluated.

Quality in education should be seen as a never-ending process in development.

The scope of this document

The present document, builds on previous reflections and documents, especially on the report of the Consultative Meeting on "Implementing quality and innovation in the educational activities of the Directorate of Youth and Sport" held in February 2003 [DJS/ET (2003) 1].

This document, created in 2005 and revised in 2007, is intended to be a reference for all those involved and concerned by the DYS education and training activities, including staff, trainers and consultants, participants and partner organisations. It represents also the commitments of the Council of Europe in relation to its education and training activities with young people. While the standards cannot be set in the same way in all activities, they should serve as a benchmark for the evaluation of any activity.

It is hoped these standards will contribute to deepening and widening the transparency, accountability, reproducibility, sustainability, quality and innovation of activities so that the Council of Europe can remain a trend-setter and a provider of high quality non-formal education in the youth field, based on the values of human rights and human rights education and sustained by reflected intercultural learning practice.

The standards should apply to all the activities organised *by* or in co-operation with the Youth Department of the DYS having a predominant education or training nature regardless of the place where they are held. They should be understood as *minimum* standards; stricter or more specific ones can/should be implemented at the European youth centres in their role as centres of intercultural educational innovation and development¹. These criteria should be reviewed and updated regularly.

¹ E.g. the technical standards which apply to study sessions [DJS/EYCB/ADMIN/2003/45].

QUALITY STANDARDS AND CRITERIA OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

The purpose of these standards is to ensure that the education and training activities can benefit from the best conditions possible and are run according to the most efficient and effective usage of educational, financial and technical resources. Their explicit nature is a quality standard in itself because it helps to ensure:

- Relevance to the youth policy and priorities of the Council of Europe;
- Transparency in the learning and training process;
- Accountability towards stakeholders and participants;
- Reproducibility of good practices.

Quality standards as defined by the education and training unit of the DYS are:

1. A relevant needs assessment;
2. Concrete, achievable and assessable objectives;
3. The definition of competences addressed and learning outcomes for the participants;
4. The relevance to the Council of Europe programme and DYS priorities;
5. An adequate and timely preparation process;
6. A competent team of trainers;
7. An integrated approach to intercultural learning;
8. Adequate recruitment and selection of participants;
9. A consistent practice of non-formal education principles and approaches;
10. Adequate, accessible and timely documentation;
11. A thorough and open process of evaluation;
12. Structurally optimal working conditions and environment;
13. Adequate institutional support and an integrated follow-up within the DYS programme and its partner organisations;
14. Visibility, innovation and research.

Criteria to measure if quality standards are met

1. A relevant needs assessment

Basing activities on clear needs and expectations of the Council of Europe and its partners and on the political, social, cultural and educational reality they are meant to address is a pre-requisite to ensure the activities are relevant, their results are sustainable and the various stakeholders see their expectations fulfilled. It also allows the trainers and participants to stay on course with the terms of reference (implicit or explicit) and to be accountable for their work.

- 1.1. Activities must have a clear reference to the needs and context of which they are part, including their role in the Council of Europe programme of activities ;

- 1.2. Their medium/long-term function must also be explicit in the presentations of the course;
- 1.3. They should (also) be evaluated against their strategic function;
- 1.4. The reasons why the Council of Europe is running or supporting the activity ought to be made explicit to the trainers, participants, secretariat, partners and statutory bodies;
- 1.5. Specific expectations (e.g. of partners or sponsors) should also be explicit;
- 1.6. The needs identification should make use, when possible, of existing relevant research on the problems addressed.

2. Concrete, achievable and assessable objectives

Each activity, in addition to the overall aims that derive from the needs analysis (including political and cultural dimensions), must always have concrete educational and social objectives that will allow for an adequate programme to be developed, for the identification and recruitment of the best suited target groups, for an adequate evaluation process and for a consistent follow-up.

Evaluation of objectives and results should take into account that the impact and outcomes of an educational activity can often be assessed only on a long-term perspective.

- 2.1. Activities must have identified and concrete, achievable and assessable objectives, based on qualitative and quantitative criteria, preferably with indicators that can be used in the evaluation;
- 2.2. The objectives should be identifiable in the programme of activities; similarly each activity in the programme should clearly correspond to objectives;
- 2.3. The definition of the aims and broader political and social objectives should be provided by the DYS statutory bodies ; the definition of educational and learning objectives should be the responsibility of the trainers and open for adjustment with the participants and their organisations (especially on longer-term training processes);
- 2.4. The evaluation of the objectives should be linked with the activity's contribution to the Directorate's programmes and projects.

3. Definition of competences addressed and learning outcomes for the participants

Training activities run by or in co-operation with the DYS must have a clear, implicit or explicit, set of competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) to be addressed and developed with and by the participants. While they may be explicit or implicit, they should be explainable and, if possible, made understandable to the participants.

It is understood that broader educational activities may have less specific competences than specialised training courses.

- 3.1. The competences to be developed in a training course should be identifiable;
- 3.2. When possible, the competences should be made explicit to participants;
- 3.3. The competences should match with the participants' training needs and expectations;

- 3.4. The competences should be identifiable through the objectives and programme of the activity;
- 3.5. The development of the competences should be assessed within the evaluation of the activity.

4. Relevance to the Council of Europe programme and DYS priorities

The activities, especially when based on open calls for participation, are a means of making the priorities and programme of activities of the Council of Europe known and accessible to its target groups. They are, obviously, the way through which the Council of Europe pursues its longer-term and annual objectives in the youth sector, including support to youth policy development in member states.

- 4.1. The description of the activities should reflect clearly their role in the DYS' programme and objectives including, where appropriate, in relation to individual member states;
- 4.2. The activities should also be evaluated against their role in the overall project programme or programme of which they are part;
- 4.3. Each activity should take into account previous experience in similar activities and provide indications for other activities in the programmes to come;
- 4.4. They should be monitored and evaluated by the statutory bodies against the results and using the same rationale of objectives that determined holding them.

5. An adequate and timely preparation process

A successful activity depends largely on a timely, thorough and complete preparatory process, in which all major aspects of the activity are considered. This is especially true in the case of activities with an intercultural dimension, in which there is a specific need for developing a culture of communication and cooperation. Experience shows that cuts on the preparation time often have negative consequences on the results of the activity.

- 5.1. All activities must include at least one two day preparatory meeting in addition to time for the selection of participants (when this is the responsibility of the team of trainers). This does not include possible preparatory meetings immediately before the activity;
- 5.2. New activities – or those predominantly run with a new team of trainers – should have two preparatory meetings;
- 5.3. The activities should be run by the same team of trainers and facilitators that prepared them;
- 5.4. Long term training courses which are composed of several phases require preparation and evaluation consistent with their structure and duration. For the purposes of calculating the number of preparation and evaluation days adequate to this training format, each phase could be seen as an individual activity, requiring both preparation and evaluation;
- 5.5. The first preparatory meetings should be held at the latest ten weeks before the start of the course.

6. A competent team of trainers

Learning and competence development, as well as the intercultural learning process, rely heavily on the competences and abilities of the trainers responsible for the activity. The DYS bases its educational offer on multicultural teams of trainers and facilitators, with complementary roles and competences, recruited through a transparent process and accountable to all stakeholders.

The presence of competent Council of Europe staff, educational advisors or administrators, supports the creation of a field and corporate identity within the Council of Europe and the development of a similar professional level and objectives by external trainers, researchers or members of teams.

- 6.1. The training activities should be planned and run by a multicultural and multinational team of trainers or facilitators composed of at least three people; activities should never rely exclusively on one trainer or educator;
- 6.2. All activities should be prepared and run directly with at least one member of DYS staff; in case of activities held in cooperation with other organisations, they should be supervised by a member of staff of the DYS;
- 6.3. Trainers should be recruited through an open process, notably by making use of the DYS Trainers' Pool and, where appropriate, of trainers suggested by the European Youth Forum;
- 6.4. The competences required and expected from the trainers should be clear in the calls for trainers;
- 6.5. The teams of trainers should be composed so as to safeguard gender balance, geographical/cultural balance in the team, complementarity of expertise and experiences (notably in assuring general and specific competences) and direct experiences with the themes of the activity. When activities are specific to a country or region, the presence of trainers from that country or region should be guaranteed;
- 6.6. The composition of the teams should reflect the specificities of the group of participants as far as possible;
- 6.7. The teams should integrate senior and junior trainers except in justified cases (e.g. advanced training courses) and allow for the involvement of competent former participants (when relevant);
- 6.8. The trainers should be acquainted with the values and work of the Council of Europe and able to introduce or put into practice its main policy documents (e.g. relevant conventions or recommendations) and educational resources (e.g. Compass, T-Kits, Education Pack "all different-all equal", European Knowledge Centre);
- 6.9. The remuneration of trainers should be according to standard rates and practices in the Directorate except in duly justified cases;
- 6.10. The trainers should be informed about the financial conditions according to which they will be working before the beginning of the activity.

7. An integrated approach to intercultural learning

Intercultural learning is one of the foundations of the DYS' educational philosophy and practice. In the practice of education and training activities, intercultural learning should be part of the formal programme (in an explicit or implicit manner) and inform the overall methodology of the activities.

- 7.1. Multicultural training activities must have a minimum duration of four full working days;
- 7.2. The teams of trainers must have a multicultural composition, reflecting the linguistic, social and cultural realities of the group of participants;
- 7.3. An optimal usage of the resources for interpretation or translation must be sought;
- 7.4. Training activities should in principle remain bi-lingual and every effort should be made to cater for the linguistic needs of all participants
- 7.5. Preparatory documents (and other essential educational resources, such as speakers and resource persons) should be provided in the working languages of the activity where possible;
- 7.6. The trainers should be aware of their own cultural biases and be able to reflect on them with participants;
- 7.7. The usage of educational concepts and references from more than one national reference or origin should be promoted;
- 7.8. All working languages should be represented in team of trainers of the course;
- 7.9. The trainers and organisers must adhere strictly to the principles of human rights, their implications in a European training activity and be familiar with the concepts and practice of human rights education.
- 7.10. The trainers must be able and committed to address cases of prejudice that may occur in the activity;
- 7.11. The trainers and organisers should be aware of the existence and functioning of discrimination and their possible expression among the group of participants and how to deal with it; they should permanently address and take into account the perspectives and points of view of minority or under-represented groups, as well as the participants' special needs (e.g. related to disabilities or to faith or religious beliefs) and show a commitment to gender equality;
- 7.12. The team of trainers must be able to engage in conflict transformation with participants in strict observance of human rights principles.

8. Recruitment and selection of participants

The selection and recruitment of participants should be made in a way that secures transparency, objectivity and secures equality of chances for all those applying.

- 8.1. The activities must have an open process of recruitment and a transparent set of criteria and procedures of selection;
- 8.2. The calls for application must include a specific description of the target groups or profile of the participants;
- 8.3. The activities must be publicised in the working languages expected to be used;

- 8.4. Applicants must systematically receive an acknowledgement of receipt of their application and the results of the selection;
- 8.5. The activities must be systematically publicised on the DYS Internet sites, including the European Knowledge Centre, at the same time, or earlier, as calls go out;
- 8.6. The selection of participants should take into account the priority given to effective potential multipliers within governmental and non-governmental organisations, the need to associate groups under-represented in the activities or in the society structures and to secure a diversity of experiences and ideological preferences of non-governmental organisations;
- 8.7. The selection of participants should be completed 4-6 weeks before the start of the activity so as to enable enough time for participants to prepare themselves for the activity (including formalities for obtaining visas).

9. A consistent practice of non-formal education principles and approaches

The DYS' activities are primarily non-formal education activities. As such, they will respect and develop the commonly accepted pedagogical principles of non-formal education, notably in respect to participant-centeredness, action-oriented and value-based.

- 9.1. The activities must take into account the participants' training needs and learning preferences/abilities; the trainers should be able to negotiate these with the participants using a participatory approach;
- 9.2. The trainers and participants should recognise the value of the activity for transformative learning and education;
- 9.3. The programme and methods should provide a fair balance of development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and an awareness of the key values underlying the activity;
- 9.4. The participants must be actively engaged in the learning process;
- 9.5. The programme and methods should take into account participants' own experience and competence;
- 9.6. The participants should not be subject to formal systems of individualised evaluation;
- 9.7. The participants should be empowered and encouraged to evaluate and critically reflect about the learning process;
- 9.8. The participants have the right to receive a certificate of their attendance in the activity; this should not lead to confusion about the non-formal nature of those activities.

10. Adequate, accessible and timely documentation

All activities must be documented especially with regard to their results and outcomes. The documentation is a way to secure follow-up by participants and their synergetic effect on other activities and organisations.

- 10.1. The form of the documentation may vary from activity to activity;

- 10.2. The documentation should be ready within 12 months after the completion of the activity;
- 10.3. The documentation should systematically be available to all participants and their organisations and potentially – even if in a different form – to all those concerned by youth work and non-formal education; the documentation should ideally be made available in the languages in the which the activity was delivered;
- 10.4. The documentation should respect the principles of confidentiality of data about participants and take into account possible concerns regarding their security;
- 10.5. Documentation of the activities should systematically be available on the Internet, including the European Knowledge Centre;
- 10.6. Preparatory meetings and evaluation meetings should be the object of specific reports available to DYS staff.

11. A planned and open process of evaluation

An adequate evaluation of the activities is crucial to secure, among others, stock-taking of the results, the evaluation of the quality of the learning process and the follow-up to be given.

- 11.1. All activities must be the object of a specific evaluation meeting. The meeting should be held at earliest 6 weeks after the activity and six months at the latest, with the exception of study sessions where the evaluation meeting may be held right at the end of the activity;
- 11.2. In the specific case of national field activities, the evaluation meeting may be held right after the end of the activity. This should not prejudice the need for other post-course or medium-term impact evaluations;
- 11.3. The needs of evaluation should be addressed during the first preparatory meetings of the activity;
- 11.4. The evaluation should take into account the perspectives of the participants, trainers and organisers. In as far as possible it should include recorded data and information and make use of qualitative and quantitative criteria;
- 11.5. The evaluation reports and their main conclusions should be made available to all DYS staff and to the activity's participants (while respecting confidentiality of personal data);
- 11.6. The evaluation meetings should consider also ways to support the participants and follow-up the activity within the Council of Europe and by the partners.

12. Structurally optimal working conditions and environment

The working conditions and environment in which the activities are held play a crucial role in their success. As a general principle, the success of an activity should never be conditioned by the working conditions and facilities.

- 12.1. The activities should take place in an appropriate and favourable physical environment for learning;
- 12.2. Activities should, where feasible, operate at a standardised level of technical quality. In other words, conditions of work, wherever possible, should be

envisaged at the level of those that take place inside the European Youth Centre, even if they take place outside. Advance preparation and careful attention are needed to ensure this;

- 12.3. Structurally optimal conditions imply that standards related to the venue, working conditions or technical resources, are analysed within the broader social and economical reality in which the activity is placed, while making sure that the quality of the educational process is safeguarded;
- 12.4. The European Youth Centres must retain their pioneering and innovative role with regards to a supportive learning environment, notably by being open to new pedagogical and technological tools and serve as a reference for training activities in Europe;
- 12.5. Financial and human resources must be consistently allocated to the programme of activities, namely by prioritising quality over quantity.

13. An adequate institutional support and an integrated follow-up within the programme of the DYS and its partner organisations

- 13.1. Each DYS activity should enjoy the administrative and institutional support and recognition of the organisation;
- 13.2. The activities are rarely valid per se; their results are often made more sustainable if integrated and considered in a medium-term programme, such as the three-year priorities;
- 13.3. The evaluation of activities must consider ways to follow-up and to take up the results in other activities in the same programme of project;
- 13.4. The follow-up should consider initiatives to be taken by the Directorate and others to be taken up by its partners;
- 13.5. The follow-up should consider measures related to education and training and those related to youth policy development;
- 13.6. The planning of the yearly programme of activities must take into account the conclusions of previous evaluations and seek synergies between activities;
- 13.7. The activities must be effectively reported in view of their monitoring and evaluation by the statutory bodies.

14. Visibility, innovation and research

Visibility is the recognition of the value of the activities, a condition for their viability and effort in transparency of the organisation. Innovation and research secure that quality will develop and respond to the needs of an ever-changing society and youth scene.

- 14.1. All activities must be publicised and information about them made available on the Internet (including the European Knowledge Centre);
- 14.2. All activities must be clearly recognisable as Council of Europe activities;
- 14.3. The results of projects initiated within the framework of activities (e.g. long-term training courses) should be the object of specific publication or visibility measures;
- 14.4. Flagship or innovative projects should regularly be initiated and be subject to specific visibility measures (e.g. through special publications and studies);

- 14.5. The practice of consultative meetings or seminars on education matters should be reinforced with the view of keeping the DYS educational staff and its trainers pool updated on innovations and debates around similar pedagogical practices.
- 14.6. Pilot research projects should be initiated on matters related to intercultural non-formal education youth activities, including ways to assess the long-term results and impact of the education and training activities of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.