

International Centre for Guidance Studies

The E-Valorisation of Religious Diversity Training (E-Valored)

External Evaluation Report Executive Summary

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Executive summary

Background to the training programme and the evaluation

i) The Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training Programme is designed to recognise and respect multicultural diversity, to confront prejudice and discrimination, and to develop intercultural skills. The core of the programme is a training handbook (available in English, French and German) containing a suite of activities designed to provide an experiential learning programme for a variety of target groups. Each activity is supported by relevant background information and appropriate guidance notes for trainers and facilitators. The handbook is updated periodically in response to feedback from the developers, trainers/facilitators and participants. More recently, two additional documents have been produced containing activities and materials specifically relating to Antisemitism and Islamophobia modules respectively.

ii) The training programme handbook was developed through a previous Grundtvig-funded project involving a number of European partners led by CEJI – A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe, based in Brussels. Since the development of the first training materials in 2004, the record shows that, to date, a total of at least 44 separate courses or workshops linked to the Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination training programme have been delivered to 630 participants in 14 countries, all but three of which (Israel, Switzerland and Turkey) are in the European Union. Individuals benefiting from the programme have come from a wide range of backgrounds in terms of their religious affiliation, the nature of their work and their involvement in the local communities in which they live.

iii) The purpose of the current Transversal project – E-Valored – was to continue to develop and adapt the training programme, and to disseminate and evaluate its impact as it was implemented in a variety of European and local cross-sectoral contexts. As a result of this European-wide dissemination of the programme, a growing team of trainers and facilitators has been established. Building upon this, the project will move into its next phase of development during 2009/2012 in the form of ‘Belieforama’ – a training brand designed to further disseminate the training programme and strengthen the network of trainers and facilitators into a vibrant and formally established ‘Community of Practice’ (CoP).

iv) In view of the importance of evaluation to the current E-Valored project, The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS), University of Derby, England, was subcontracted by CEJI to carry out an external evaluation of the training programme. The purpose of the external evaluation was to assess the training programme’s pedagogical approach and its effectiveness and impact as it was disseminated in a variety of European and local contexts. This report summarises the findings of the external evaluation.

Findings of the external evaluation

v) The external evaluation sought to assess the training programme by means of the following three evaluation indicators:

- The *integrity and quality of the training programme materials*, as rated and validated by independent 'experts'.
- The *immediate impact* of the training programme in terms of the extent to which participants valued and benefited from the programme experience.
- The *longer-term impact* of the training programme in terms of the subsequent experiences and actions of participants, and in terms of the extent of the dissemination and usage of the programme materials.

vi) In assessing these evaluation indicators, the evaluators drew upon information from the following sources:

- Evaluator observation of the development and implementation process and evaluator assessment of the training materials and activities.
- Feedback from independent 'expert' sources on the quality and relevance of the programme.
- Feedback from participants and facilitators, recorded using a variety of evaluation instruments and questionnaires.
- The recorded usage and dissemination of the training materials since 2004.

The integrity and quality of the training programme materials

vii) The feedback from independent experts on the programme and its pedagogical approach is very positive. Both Robert Jackson, Director of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick, England, and Rabbi David Rosen, an internationally recognised expert in inter-religious dialogue and understanding, have provided very favourable feedback on the materials. Rabbi Rosen has highlighted the training programme's excellent potential for constructively engaging people who live in multicultural societies in ignorance of one another; Robert Jackson has highlighted the inter-religious, intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration behind the success of the handbook.

'I want to emphasise that the production of the Handbook is a superb achievement of inter-religious, intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration. There is no doubt that the Handbook as it stands would facilitate a great deal of learning.'

Robert Jackson, Director of Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick, England

viii) Dr. Massimo Faggioli, from the University of Bologna and the Free University of Bolzano, has applied and tested some of the training materials on a number of university students who are studying to become primary school teachers in regions of Northern Italy where the numbers of non-Catholic pupils is rising. Dr. Faggioli's feedback from this trial confirms the relevance and usefulness of the materials in providing important background information about the relations between religions, and in outlining approaches of what teachers can and can't do in dealing with religious diversity in a classroom.

ix) In addition, it is important to highlight the fact that in 2008 the European Commission awarded its Gold Prize for Lifelong Learning for the development of the Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training programme. The programme came first in its category of lifelong learning awards and Mr. Ján Figel, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, underlined its significant contribution to improving the delivery of adult education.

The immediate impact of the training programme

x) Written feedback from participants recorded at the conclusion of workshops and courses was generally very positive. A clear majority of participants (typically 90% and above) reported they had enjoyed the experience, were satisfied with the programme and that their needs had been either fully or partly met.

'This has been a fantastic experience for me. I have achieved more than I expected. It was very uplifting for me – I didn't know I could learn so much in 5-days!'

Participant on a 5-day 'training the trainers' course, Sofia, Bulgaria, March 2007

xi) When asked what they thought they had learnt from the programme, the majority of participants reported that they were now more knowledgeable, skilled, or more motivated, in a variety of different ways. For example, many reported that they were now more aware of potential 'sensitivities' linked to religious and cultural difference, and more motivated to continue to learn about religious diversity issues. Many participants were also clearly enthusiastic about taking forward the lessons they had learnt from the programme into their own professional and/or personal lives.

'I am now more confident in my perspective of my faith and my interactions with others in theirs. Thank you for allowing me on the course - it has helped me more than you will ever know.'

Participant on a 3-day workshop, Derby, England, February 2008

xii) However, for some events, a small minority of participants did highlight areas for further improvement. The examples given were varied and specific and it was often difficult to determine precise emerging patterns. Where similar examples were given by more than one individual, these included:

- Issues relating to the venue where the course/workshop was held.
- A desire for activities and strategies for tackling controversial religious issues current in Western European societies.
- Further adapting the approach for specific groups with specific needs.
- Further factual information about different religions and belief systems.

The longer-term impact of the training programme

xiii) For 5-day courses and shorter workshops, delivered in 2008 and 2009, participants were followed-up by email, typically six-months after their programme experience, and asked whether the programme had proved to be relevant, or useful, in their professional and/or personal lives. The overall response rate to this post-workshop survey was 62.39%. The follow-up data showing this longer-term impact of the programme is mixed but encouraging. Many respondents gave very specific and 'concrete' examples of the relevance and usefulness of the programme; many others gave more generalised examples of impact, or of potential, possible impact.

xiv) Some specific examples of longer-term impact reported by participants are highlighted as follows. A teacher of multi-ethnic groups said the programme had helped them to facilitate issues between students: following a conflict between a Bulgarian and a Roma child, the teacher used a 'Rights of Passage' exercise to make all the class aware of different beliefs and rituals and how important it is to respect each other. A Catholic priest said that some of the activities and the emerging themes had informed his preaching to his congregation. One participant reported that the programme had helped resolve issues in relation to the baptism of a child in a family where the mother is Catholic and the father is Muslim. A medical doctor said that the programme had helped in becoming more tolerant and understanding of people from different ethnic groups and religions. A human resource manager said that information gleaned from the course had proved useful in compiling fact sheets on granting time off to employees for significant religious events.

'I've learned some good strategies how to integrate religious minorities and how to improve the intercultural communication and trust. Last but not least I've got a huge support of my intention to make a special effort in order to help religious minorities in their requests.'

Austrian Police Commander on a 5-day 'training the trainers' course, Lisbon, Portugal, May 2009

'Last Wednesday I organised an interesting contest between my school and the neighbour school, called "World`s religions. Symbols and concepts". It was a nice experience, useful for students and teachers.'

Romanian school teacher Toulouse, after a 5-day 'training the trainers' course, France, February 2008

xv) As already mentioned above, from 2004 to date, the record shows that a total of at least 44 separate courses or workshops linked to the Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination training programme have been delivered to 630 participants in 14 countries. This record of delivery helps provide an indication of the impact of the programme in terms of its dissemination and 'penetration' across countries, communities and sectors. These statistics also provide a strong foundation on which the new Belieforama project can build and should provide a benchmark against which future dissemination can be measured.

Conclusions and next steps

xvi) The overall conclusion of the external evaluation is that the Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training programme is a good product. It has been reviewed and endorsed by a number of independent experts and the evaluation has provided evidence of its effectiveness and impact to date. The partnership has also demonstrated its ability to respond to user feedback to continue to adapt and develop the programme in response to need; and doubtless this process of continuous improvement will continue into the future.

xvii) However, although the programme is a good and evolving product, there are some significant challenges facing the partnership which are essentially organisational and practical in nature. Indeed, the overall nature of these challenges is explicitly recognised in the new Belieforama project application form.

'The challenge of this project is to continuously generate innovation and motivation that keeps people and organisations active.'

Page 52, Belieforama GRUNDTVIG project application form

xviii) These challenges concern the partnership's ability to develop and maintain a vibrant and active Community of Practice in order that the delivery of the programme, and its impact on individuals and communities, is 'multiplied' across countries, communities and sectors. This challenge will be

made all the greater given the changed and potentially difficult funding environment that will apply to the new Belieforama project. In order to ensure that the Community of Practice actively disseminates the programme in multiple, diverse contexts, it will need to connect with wider networks and be supported by effective quality assurance and clear communication arrangements. The partnership will need to show purposeful leadership in managing these developments, and in communicating effectively with the Community of Practice members, in order to maintain momentum.

xix) The external evaluation concludes with seven specific recommendations designed to help the partnership address the challenges as it moves forward into the Belieforama project. The recommendations focus upon the following range of issues:

- Demonstrating an appropriate balance between purposeful leadership and direction from the partnership, and discussion and consultation with members of the Community of Practice.
- Communicating, clearly and in detail, the outcomes of the Turin 2009 users' seminar to delegates, including a written quality assurance framework and an evaluation framework for use by the Community of Practice.
- Exploring and developing additional and alternative ways for members to meet, network and share experiences that are more cost-effective than the standard users' seminar.
- Strengthening arrangements to ensure that individuals are targeted to join the Community of Practice who are best placed to support the implementation of the programme and most likely to be active and effective in doing so.

Although the partnership is already aware of many of these issues, it is hoped that the seven recommendations will provide a formalised structure to help guide and support the development of the new project over the next three years.

International Centre for Guidance Studies

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