
Making the Difference Conference

17th November 2011 MIE

Response rate

Evaluation forms were received from 31 delegates at the conference.

Q1 to Q4 Satisfaction ratings

Overall satisfaction ratings of the registration process, speakers, content of sessions and behaviour of conference staff were very high. 22 of the 31 responses were very satisfied with the registration process with 9 satisfied. 24 out of 31 were very satisfied with the speakers/presenters with the remainder (7) satisfied and 25 of the 31 strongly agreed with the statement that 'conference staff were helpful and courteous' with the remainder (9) agreeing.

Q 5. Future Conferences

The responses to question 5 'what kind of sessions would you like to see included at future conferences?' was varied. 4/17 asked for more information on Lifelong Learning Programmes specifically Grundtvig (1), Erasmus (1) and Commenius (2). It is to be presumed that some delegates were not familiar with all aspects of the programme.

5/17 praised the existing programme and content as 'most beneficial' and 'excellent'. There were further suggestions that different examples of projects should be included perhaps with 'poster presentations and do's and don'ts of projects' (1) This was allied with a request for information on how to apply for various travelling opportunities (1) and a 'networking event related to groups applying for funding' (1).. One individual requested 'sessions relating to needs of education system' and a suggestion that 'non administrative participants on programmes could present in person' (1). It would be useful to add the delegate email list to programme mailings so that they could be informed when information sessions are being held.

Q.6 What did you like most about the Conference? 29 responses

6 respondents praised the organisation with two highlighting the venue as excellent 'good presentation. Well organised. Great venue'. These comments were complemented by comments on timing and efficiency 'it was well organised, the sessions weren't too long'. Atmosphere was also praised 'timing – well laid down –not too packed! Kept to time. Great atmosphere and collegial. Thanks'.

The presentations themselves and the presenters were praised with 11 very positive responses 'I thought the speakers were very informative and gave clear descriptions of their projects' and 'the sheer variety and great level of detail and information presented concisely.

The input from Gerard Doyle (1)and the Commission (2) were also highlighted 'opportunity to meet Joanna and the people from Leargas and see the future potential and possibilities'. The chance to hear presentations from beneficiaries and from project coordinators (4) was appreciated including the use of video (1) 'videos bringing experiences to life – tangible'.

Q.7 What did you like least about the Conference?

Small response to this question with 10 comments. 3 of these stated that nothing needed to be changed while 2 suggested breaks between presentations and starkly a seeming dislike of 'the project samples'. One commented 'all was very good – more multimedia presentations!'

2 responses pointed out the lighting difficulty in the main room 'poor lighting – difficult to view material presentations' while acknowledging its cause 'the light in conference room while it facilitates the screen is very dim'. Another highlighted 'people whispering when the speakers were giving their presentations' and 'some speakers spoke too quickly'. These comments perhaps are down to personal tastes and manners.

One final comment highlighted specific needs for rural delegates 'train to be caught at 5.10 a.m.!' which is a consideration for any Dublin centric conference although the later start to the Conference should go some way towards addressing their needs.

Q.8 In what ways could this Conference be improved?

Out of 12 responses, over half (7) were clear that no improvement was necessary and were grateful for the opportunity to attend 'very information and beneficial session, well done! Thank you!' One comment advised 'get more people to attend'(1) while another stated 'the room could have been warmer' (1). Two comments suggested a ten minute break or a short time after presentations for audience questions while one comment asked 'can it be held outside of Dublin or Information Sessions at least held around the country?'. Again the inclusion of delegates on programme emailing lists could in some way meet this person's need.

Flipchart Evaluation

Tips/ideas people took away?

Two comments appreciated 'engaging everyone in a group by giving them a function and then rotate so everyone can have different experiences' and suggested 'a virtual discussion group' to maintain the contacts made. A WOW factor was the 'personal experience' game/exercise in terms of building awareness.

What worked for you?

Four comments emphasised the exchange of experiences, meeting other participants and the table islands 'great idea'.

In response to the question 'how can we improve your experience of LLP?' comments included more clarity about provision of sub(stitution) cover for teachers, a system of recognition – organisations are very focused on examinations/certificates and a highlight of the fact that 'LLP experience can be seen as 'extra to the important work!!!!'.

Staff Evaluation

1. How effective was the registration process?

Overall staff found the registration process worked well and seemed effective. Points to capture included:

- Staff representatives at registration unaware of lunchtime arrangements – would be useful to provide this info at registration so everyone understands the flow of the day.
- Would have been useful to capture final interest in workshops (at registration).
- Need to acknowledge receipt of registration and say we're looking forward to working with them at event.
- Need for earlier email requesting participants to confirm their attendance at event perhaps a week or two before? The week of the event appears to be too late.

2. Were the speakers/presenters appropriate?

All respondents found the speakers/presenters appropriate and well chosen. The mix of representatives from project level, National Agency level, Government level and EU level was effective. All programmes in LLP were well represented. The mixture of video footage, photos and different foci of presentations was highlighted. One respondent stated 'made us feel very proud of our projects!'. Another stated the varied effect – 'Joanna's was complex, Ministers' was just read out, others were good (very good in case of 3 Irish project orgs) and videos (partic last one) worked well'. The presentation from Gerard Doyle on the evaluation report was received as 'beneficial as it gave an insight on how the report was prepared'.

3. Was the venue appropriate?

Overall all staff liked the venue although important points highlighted included:

- Location being a bit out of town (3)
- Main room was a bit cold and dark (due to lights off for Powerpoint)

Positive points included 'plenty of space, light and comfortable surroundings. Breakout rooms were very conducive to group work' with a 'sense of history'.

Additional points included lack of restaurant staff at lunch time and logistical needs such as additional signage for workshops and a table for presenters for notes.

4. Did the running order/timing of the Conference work in your opinion?

Overall all staff thought timing and running order worked well with significant time dedicated to morning and afternoon sessions especially since 'we had to work around the Minister's availability'.

One respondent suggested that the ‘workshops could have been a bit shorter and the plenary slightly longer’. Tea/coffee at the wrap-up session at end was appreciated ‘to keep flagging energy up!’

One respondent highlighted the fact that ‘quite a few people left during the first part of the Conference. A lot of people dropped out from the workshop as well (hard to say whether they attended the first part of the Conference and then left or just weren’t available on that day at all’. This left an imbalance in the numbers of participants at workshops. Despite this the respondent states ‘the dynamic between the participants was very good and let them fully express and share their opinions and experiences’.

5. What kind of sessions would you like to see included at future conferences?

3 out of 5 comments highlighted the success of the interactive workshops and the fact that participants were able to share their experience and also learn from each other ‘particularly as they came from different backgrounds (job, participant in different programmes e.g. LDV, Comenius and Grundtvig).

It was further suggested that ‘a space could be provided for several projects/promoters to showcase their projects at a stand so that the attendees could informally go around/observe and ask questions etc’.

It was also proposed that more input by beneficiaries could be included and expanded to encompass ‘learners, students etc in future’.

6. What did you like most about the Conference?

4 out of 7 respondents emphasised the collaborative and interactive nature of the workshops and closing session. ‘They seem to have brought the most benefits to participants who were fully engaged in them and worked towards common results’. The focus on the participants was key with comments including ‘the very active participants’ and ‘very participant led – focused on the needs of the promoters’.

The atmosphere and the venue were also praised in terms of the variety of sessions ‘the mix in terms of delivery, presentations, types of projects and particularly the interactive workshops worked very well’. The ‘good training opportunity’ to collaborate in designing the structure and content of the afternoon workshops was also emphasised.

7. What did you like least about the Conference?

Three points were highlighted two logistical: queuing for lunchtime and the entrance of the Minister for his speech ‘thought this was all very awkward’.

One respondent felt a ‘little isolated during the preparation stages as...workshop partner was no longer working on site’.

8. How effective were the workshop facilitation strategies?

Overall all respondents felt the workshop facilitation strategies were effective or very effective (3). They were 'well considered and chosen'. One comment stated 'some participants were a bit confused by the 'relay' method of moving round tables. Maybe more explanation of that would have been beneficial'.

Another respondent described how an overview was given and it was explained to participants how the workshop was structured. Even so 'some participants felt that the amount of time dedicated to each theme was too short but at the same time they managed to keep to the theme and avoid digressions'.

Another respondent explained that only a third of registered participants turned up. 'Given that we had only 8 participants I was happy that we managed to modify the workshop to suit the much smaller group'.

9. What worked and what didn't work in the Workshops?

The range of island activities appear to have worked very well. In particular, breaking everyone into groups with specific topics to discuss; moving people around (2); having a visual aid to present the findings of the group work and having a mix of experienced and new promoters worked very well. Peer learning was evident (3). Keywords on each table for each topic was successful.

The idea of a 'relay' person was misunderstood at first but worked out. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to identify who will present the groups findings at the plenary. In one workshop while 'Islanders' were writing up posters, others had nothing to do. There is a need to keep others occupied while this activity takes place. Again the issue of too little time dedicated to each theme was raised. The small numbers of some workshops were surprising at first but eventually 'considered beneficial as it let them discuss given themes in detail'.

10. In what way could the Workshops be improved?

Suggestions included different kinds of icebreakers, using an 'Island' person instead of a relay person, nominating a speaker for presenting findings, if using postits look at structure of outputs e.g. sentences instead of words.

A wish was expressed to get more people to attend, and also to keep thinking of a better way to capture the learning outcomes especially in terms of 'what we are trying to achieve and what we want for our participants to get out of the experience.'

11. In what way could the Conference be improved?

One respondent commented that the Conference was 'enjoyable and informative. Great to work with other units'. Suggestion included having evaluation/debrief within ten days of the event. One respondent reported that there was a mix-up over evaluation sheets for one workshop which resulted in a lack of sheets for immediate feedback 'a useful learning outcome for next time'.

Suggestions that the initial invitation needs to go out earlier for dates in diaries. 'A critical mass' may help to build attendance. Concern about 'no shows' was also expressed, need to ask people to confirm earlier (2). A wish for 'a way of streamlining and making the process more efficient' was expressed.

Overall respondents thought the day went very well and 'hopefully the feedback from the participants will be positive too!'