

Evaluation of the PREFACE project

PREFACE – PREparing Female students for ACademic Entrepreneurship

This evaluation report mirrors the first period of the PREFACE project from the start in December 2002 until May 2004 .

The transnational partnership constitute a central part of the evaluation which can perform changes in the work programme if this proves necessary on the basis of the experience gained from the project

The partnership organisations have met on two occasions to discuss the common aims of the project. Representatives/key actors from each country have met on one occasion to share experiences and to discuss the next common steps in the project.

The key actors and the coordinators from the participating countries have answered surveys and made some personal reflections on the ongoing work in their country. This report gives some highlights on the work in the focus groups and other activities undertaken in the different countries. The report also gives reflections from the search conference.

11 countries in joint work

Responsible in the project are actors in ten (10) Member States. Switzerland, not an EU-member state is the eleventh partner in PREFACE. In the evaluation report they are called **partnership organisations**.

Project activities are undertaken by nine (9) of the partnership organisations. (You'll find more information on the partnership organisations and their responsibilities under each country)

The project activities that the partnership organisations have agreed upon are dialogues in groups with key actors. These groups are, in the report, referred to as **focus groups**. The focus groups consists of key actors; university teachers, entrepreneurs, business supporting organisations, career advisors, students and the national coordinator.

All partnership organisations, together with representatives from the focus groups also took part in a search conference. The aim of the conference was to gather partners from each country to share experiences in a joint transnational dialogue.

Apart from the focus groups there are other activities on the national level to implement and inform about the PREFACE project. The activities could be aimed at an extended group outside of the focus groups.

Why evaluation?

There are summative and formative evaluation.

Summative evaluation puts emphasis on control, why normative evaluation emphasize support and knowledge development.

The evaluation on the PREFACE project is formative and process oriented and aims to constantly improving the quality of the project *and* illuminating how the co-operation and networking is developing in the transnational work and the regional working groups.

Responsibilities on evaluation

The external evaluator has the overall responsibility for carrying out the project evaluation in the form of a formative evaluation.

The partnership organisations (11), are responsible for gathering data from their respective country according to the contract.

Evaluation – what?

Each activity arranged on European level will be evaluated separately by using interactive tools as well as in depth interviews. The project shall secure basic information in order to increase understanding of the process initiated, to provide feedback for the interested parties and to disseminate results.

Partnership

Evaluation of transnational networking and national activities.

Access for all partners to evaluation material.

Supporters of female entrepreneurs, key actors (focus groups)

Supporting organisations in nine countries.

Evaluation of the relevance of project activities.

Partnership/evaluator

Continuous overview.

Input, feedback.

Improvement, suggestions.

Web solution – overview and actuality

Project responsables can follow all the activities during the project time.

The PREFACE website makes it possible to gather and structure a big amount of data from many levels of the project during its process.

The project website can present the results for public access.

Evaluation tool

One of the evaluation tools is a survey performed via internet and/or e-mail.

The evaluator creates a dialogue that is sent out to the key actors and/or to the national coordinator in each country. The tool is adapted to the partnership of Preface and the surveys gives, if wished for, a continuously information on ongoing activities in the different countries.

You can get more information, in English, in which frames the evaluation tool can be used on

www.quicksearch.se

Evaluation on the Search conference¹

in Sweden 25-26th of September 2003

The Search Conference Method²

Search Conference is an activity that enables large groups of people to discuss important issues in a short period of time. It enables participants of large group to diagnose the organizational issues, to collect and analyze data, to collaborate and engages in problem solving.

Participating the Search Conference

What did the participants think about the search conference?

At a transnational level the partners have met to share their experiences. One of the most important transnational actions has been to gather participants from the national focus groups for a joint transnational dialogue.

60 university teachers, students, entrepreneurs and representatives from business organisations and career advisors from eleven European countries met up for a search conference September 25th – 26th in Halmstad, Sweden.

As partners in PREFACE project, Leonardo da Vinci programme, they discussed the possibility of a common European model for supporting female engineer students to start up companies based upon their studies.

During the two days the participants shared their experiences to give a European overview over the actual situation in each country. Each partner brought “best practises” on how to support female entrepreneurship, from their own countries. These experiences were shared in the partnership, and their reports are gathered in a separate document.

This survey was sent out to the participants of the Search conference in October 2003.

*Which categories (= key actors) from the focus groups were represented in the conference?

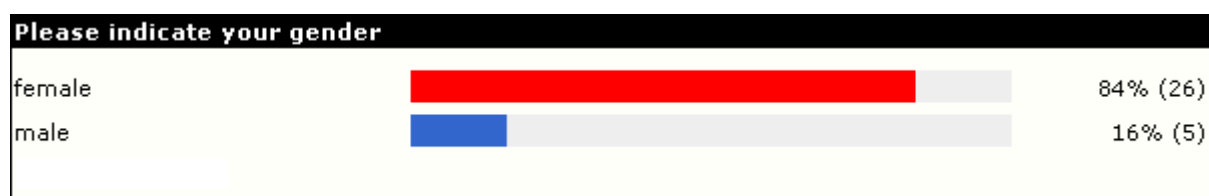
*How did they find the search conference as a model?

*How did the key actors find the work in the focus groups so far?

*Will they continue to work in the focus groups?

The answering rates were 61%, 31 out of 51 key actors answered the survey.

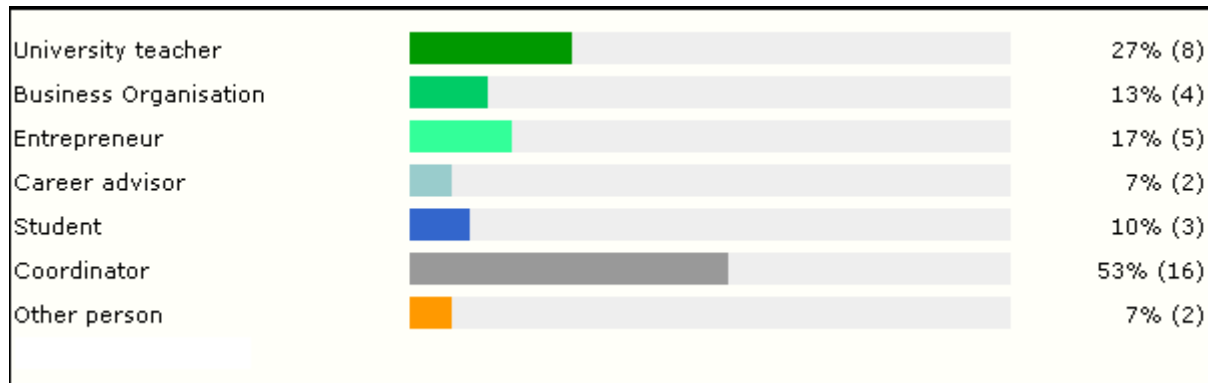
In the following You will find the results from the survey and some brief comments from the participants of the conference.



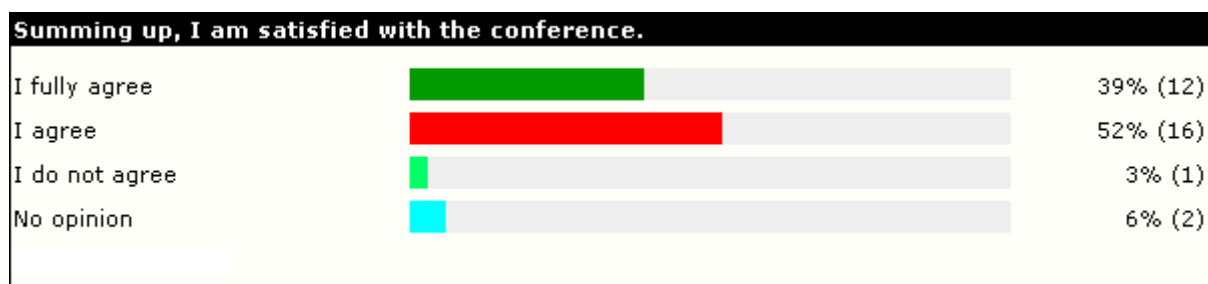
Female questions, female participation?

¹ An extended report from the Search Conference, Interim Report, November 2003. You can download the report from the website. Click on Preface Reports.

² See a description on the search conference method. Click on Search Conference.



All categories involved in the national focus group work were represented at the search conference.



The diagram shows that most of the participants were satisfied with the search conference. Down below you find some comments from them.

Can you say something about what you think was good about the conference?

- Share of experience, presentation of best practices, visit of the science park.
- The focus group idea as the form was especially good as means. At the same time it was not easy to do thus the preparatory work was big and the actual conference and the dialogue was most profitable. The country "cases" were different but the information was adequate and professional. Especially student presentations were innovative and professional. The exchange of ideas and information gives a lot for future work.
- It was a good opportunity for persons working on national level to meet at the search conference. Teachers met teachers, entrepreneurs met entrepreneurs etc.
- Introduction of the best practices.
- I found the method of the search conference very interesting and stimulating. The work in our different groups were interesting.

Can you say something about what you did not like about the conference?

- No results! Far too little time to have constructive discussions! Too many coffee brakes and late starts!

Evaluation on the work in the focus groups (key actors views)

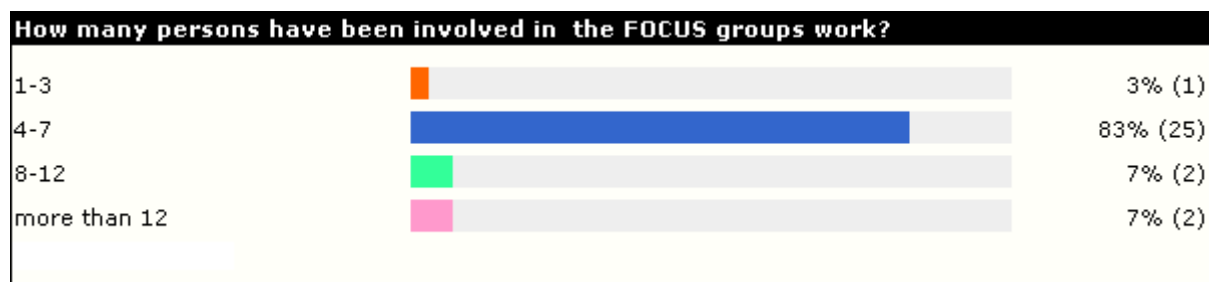
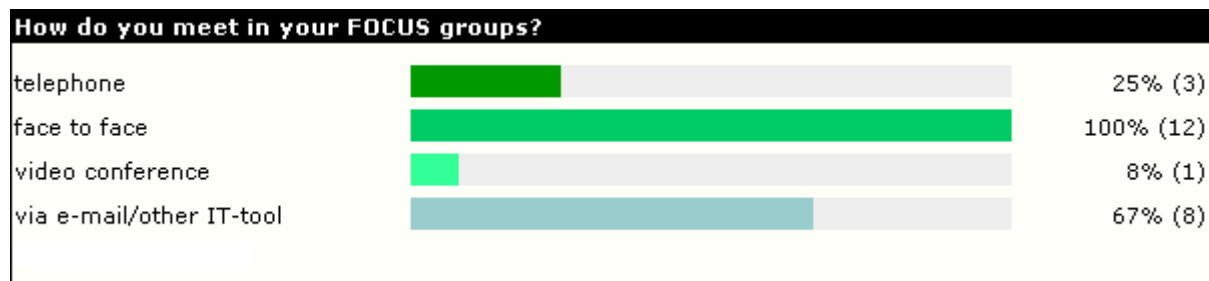
What do the key actors think of their work in the focus groups?

We are now facing the middle of the Preface project period. The project has been running for one and a half year. In October 2003 all persons participating in the search conference were asked how their work in the national focus groups has been running. In April/May 2004 all coordinators answered a survey on the on-going work in the focus groups as well as other activities in each participating country. Down below you will find diagrams and comments on their work.

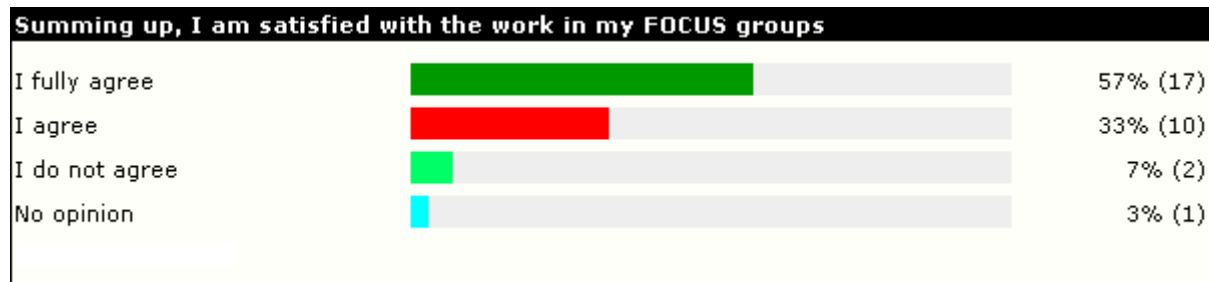
In each country, except one, the focus groups have been working since April/May 2003. In one country, Switzerland there has been more than five focus groups. The focus groups have met regularly 3-5 times until February 2004. All categories are represented in the national focus groups (i.e. teachers, career advisors, students, entrepreneurs, business organisation and of course the coordinators). Most of the meetings has been held face to face.

The work in the focus groups was first concentrated in discussions on best practices that were brought to the search conference in September 2003. The groups also prepared a "state of art" regarding entrepreneurship in general and students/female students entrepreneurship in particular. At the conference the members of the focus groups shared their experiences with partners from the different countries to create a common arena for developing new models and methods on supporting entrepreneurs in science, engineering and technology. (SET).

In each country the participants in the focus groups have met regularly. Organisations that did not work together before are using the platform that the focus groups have created to share experiences and discuss obstacles in how supporting entrepreneurship among students.



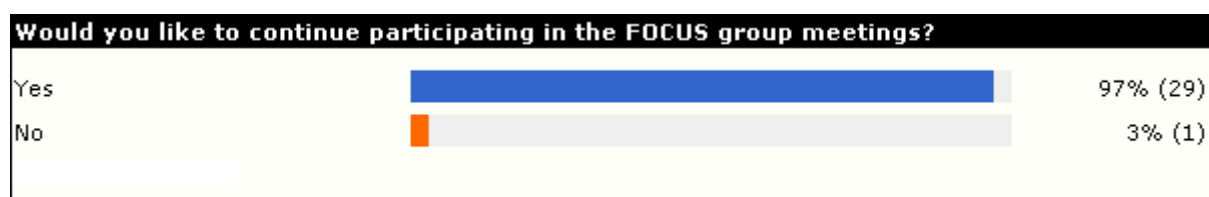
The respondents, 31 of the key actors, find their work satisfying and think that they will benefit from the PREFACE project. The input from the different key actors gives new ideas on the topic. The members get new information and new knowledge. They also share experiences among each other, which can be implemented in their working organisations.



Some comments on the work in the focus groups:

How will you benefit from participating in the focus group?

- The most important thing is to find new partners for the university, students and staff. The partners give new ideas and the focus groups discussions are a platform for never ending project activities. The focus group members are encouraged to develop their teamwork abilities as well. Students get self-confidence and entrepreneurs get an audience which they often lack.
- Awareness of important issues on female entrepreneurship in my country and building up a national network.
- We formed a group that can use each other participation, contacts and information to contribute to projects, meetings etc on (female) entrepreneurship.
- New contacts. Exchanging of ideas that I will benefit from both personally and work wise.
- Now I am part of a group with experience and knowledge on the topic of female entrepreneurship in my country. That gives me branding to my organisation, new knowledge, new contacts, more business/customers and make me think more!
- As a student I have gained a lot of things from the contact with many people and professional activities as well as people with different experiences. That has made me more open minded for my professional future.



The key actors find their work in the focus groups fruitful and the main part of the key actors would like to continue their work.

Evaluation on the work in the focus groups (coordinators views)

How to the coordinators look upon the work in the focus groups?

One important action so far has been to gather partners in a joint dialogue. The means to do this has been to involve a broad participation from actors in all the countries. At a national level, the partners have built up "focus groups", with stakeholders involved in the entrepreneurial process.

In April/May 2004 all coordinators working with focus groups, (9 out of 11) answered a survey on the on-going work in the focus groups as well as other activities in each participating country.

They were asked of opinions on their work so far and if they have found any results:

**Good and bad experiences in getting people involved in the focus group work?*

**Implementation of the Preface project on the national level so far.*

**Have the work in the focus groups been satisfactory?*

**Development and test of new methods/models on national level.*

**Examples of results and outcome from the work in the focus groups.*

Down below you will find diagrams and comments on their work.

The work in the focus groups has been going on since spring 2003, at first preparing for the search conference in Sweden in September 2003. The groups made a research on best practices and the "state of art" on student entrepreneurship in their countries. Persons involved in the focus groups are from six persons up to sixty persons in the biggest focus group.

The experience on getting people involved in the focus groups differs.

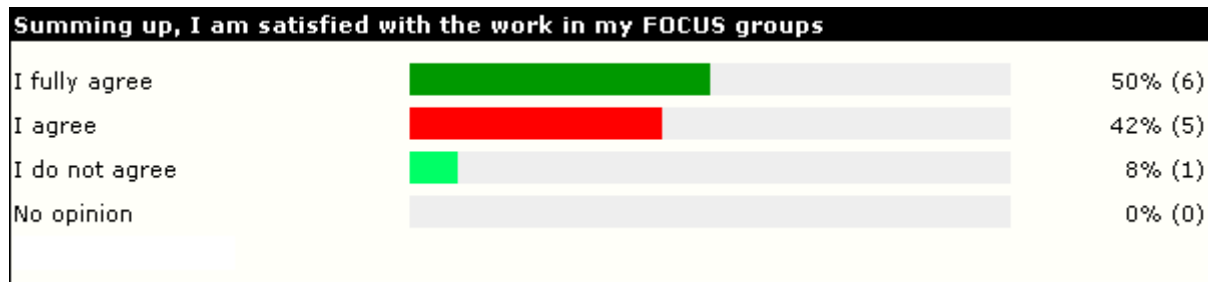


What kind of difficulties have you experienced in getting people involved in the focus group work?

- Perhaps the most difficult is to involve university teachers.
- It's hard to get all members on one time at one place.
- It's a question of priority – priority of time – or you can call it commitment to the Preface project – the commitment has to build up.

What factor have contributed to your good experiences in getting people involved in focus group work?

- Awareness of the importance of the Preface project and interest to contribute directly to the program.
- Interest in the best practices of EU-countries.
- Networking with other focus group members.
- The Preface project which opens possibilities in exchanging experiences with partners from other countries is a challenge.



The work in the focus groups is believed to be satisfactory for most of the coordinators.

Could you explain in which way the work in the focus groups has been to your satisfaction?

- Everyone has offered his or hers experience and time in order to create something useful and to give a result. The atmosphere during the meeting is very friendly which makes the work pleasant and fruitful.
- The focus group members have a clear, direct view on how promoting entrepreneurship.
- As coordinators we have gained a lot of important information on the different point of views on establishing entrepreneurship and the need for advice for female entrepreneurs. We believe that the focus group has given us a lot of inspiration for the present task in developing new learning models in the field of entrepreneurship.
- The exchange of experiences from the focus group members.
- Strong network
- Strong involvement and interest
- Tank of mentors and role models
- Good opportunity to disseminate the project
- Our focus group have become a platform concerning entrepreneurial issues in our country
- New ideas

Can you give any specific examples of outcomes or results of the work in your focus group?

- New cooperation forms. I am now cooperating with the technical university in Denmark on doing a course on free agents and entrepreneurship. This cooperation is also opening up for the Preface project making workshops on entrepreneurship for women.
- Suggestions from professors and students to increase awareness about entrepreneurship
- We have learnt a lot of thing from the career counsellor about the class of entrepreneurship in National Technical University of Athens. We have also discovered incubators in Greece and we have already contacted them.
- Model of training including traditional management skills with special focus on; mentoring, personal development and networking
- Collecting good practices for the Preface tool and method
- Meetings, conferences and workshops on the subject entrepreneurship
- Input to a model for the prototype of the Preface model
- Database of entrepreneurship courses organised by universities
- Course plan for organising the course of "high tech entrepreneurship for female students in Autumn 2004
- A Leaflet of information (dissemination) of the Preface project
- Contacts with other best practices in the region, building up a network

There have been other activities running beside the work in the focus groups in most of the partner countries; work shops, seminars, courses etc.



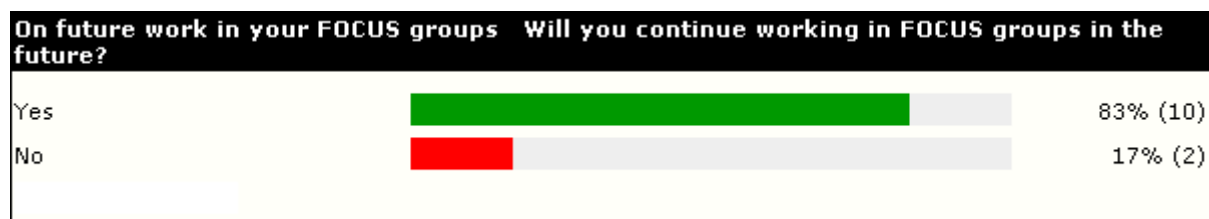
Example of other activities arranged on national level:

- Courses, networks, promoting actions and dissemination of our work
- Presentations of the Preface project in several courses and meetings
- Linking the Preface project to organisations and conferences on the subject entrepreneurship and female engineers
- As coordinators we have developed and tested a pilot for a new learning model. At the present we are concentrating on a further development of such models in order to make a test in the beginning of the Autumn
- We have made a course on starting up your own business
- Arrangements for three workshops for female engineering students and entrepreneurs in September 2004
- Presentation of the Preface project to important business organisations
- Press conference
- Conference about women and entrepreneurship
- Survey among engineering female student about their willingness to become entrepreneurs

Plans on new activities for the future:

- Beside the learning model we are planning an Open Space arrangement for a larger group of experts in entrepreneurship in order to discuss our model in a broader forum.
- Meeting with other professors with the Equal Opportunity Committee within the University
- Distribution of information at national level
- Presentation during "Entrepreneurs days"
- Set out the Preface prototype model – when the digital prototype is ready – at several universities and test it, evaluate the model with female students in SET
- We have set up a training model based on the focus group work and the results from the search conference.

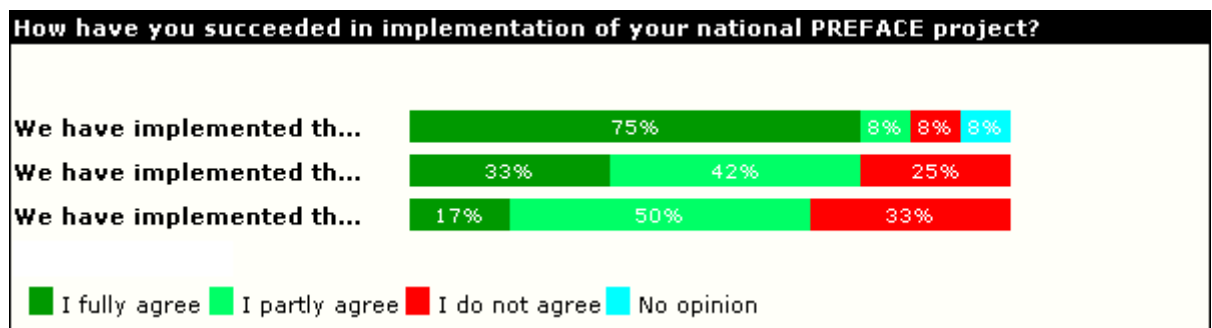
Most of the participating countries will continue the work in their focus groups. In Greece the emphasis is on the development phase on the Preface tool. The next transnational meeting will be in Athens and then the focus groups members will be invited.



After the search conference and the transnational meeting it was the Preface partner decision to test models and tools at the national level. Each country made their own choices in which model or best practice they wanted to try out.



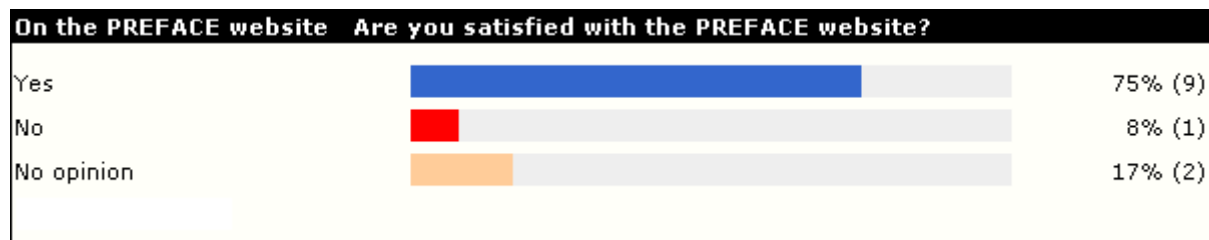
Working in projects is a way of implementing new knowledge and ideas into already existing organisations and structures. For the Preface project it is very important to engage key actors and in order to do that information and dissemination is one important issue.



Evaluation on the PREFACE web site (coordinators views)

The PREFACE project has set up a web site that presents the project and its partner organisations. The web site is continuously updated and is developed during the project period. The web site is public and therefore accessible for all with interest in the matter of supporting entrepreneurship among students.

The web sit enables the project responsables to follow all the activities during the project time. The project website is used as dissemination for the projects and will present the results for public access.



PREFACE web site www.eupreface.org is used for dissemination and open for public access.

The web site is developing during the project period and is continuously be updated. The partners can link interesting organisations, activities taking place in their countries, information and links to connecting projects etc.

Halmstad, Sweden 31th of May 2004

Mia Swärdh, Internationell kompetens