

Network to Support VET Trainers in Europe

Progress Report

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Executive Summary

The Network to Support Trainers in Europe is a direct result of two studies on trainers in VET that the European Commission commissioned in 2006. One major reason for the studies has been the fact that very little data and material is available on the situation, work and qualification of trainers as their field of activities is closely linked to informal, work-based learning, which is difficult to define and assess. At the same time has the promotion of a knowledge society and the developing impact of lifelong learning led to ever wider contexts and processes of learning, in which trainers take a new and increasingly important role. Recent research indicates a need for both initial and continuing training for trainers, linked to practice. Research also suggests that numbers of trainers who combine training responsibilities as part of their occupational profile is increasing. Against this situation, the EU has identified an urgent need to put programmes and actions in place, which on the one hand can generate more information on the situation of trainers, their training needs and future trends, and, on the other hand, can support the development of strategies and policies to meet actual and projected future needs.

The network is a major initiative to meet both requirements. It is set out to compile and synthesise, but also generate new data and information on the situation, work and qualification needs of trainers across Europe. Thereby it places an emphasis on the development and accessibility of tools and e-learning approaches, which can directly be applied by practitioners and programme managers. Concurrently, the network is fostering the political dialogue and exchange to identify strategies for improving the situation and qualification of trainers both at the national level, but also in a European perspective. It aims at combining information and content with a programmatic strategy and recommendations of how such a strategy can be put into practice at sectoral and national level as well as a European level.

We believe that mutual exchange, learning and communication among experts and practitioners is the best way to achieve this goal. Thus, community building is a key approach of the network as is an inclusive approach that can reach out to as many countries and members of the target group as possible by applying innovative web-based tools and technology. The network's platform in particular is piloting innovative e-features for knowledge sharing and distribution. Apart from organising two major joint network activities for data collection and developing a European 'roadmap' for the continuing professional development of trainers, the network organises two e-conferences. With those media the network introduces and pilots an innovative tool of exchange, communication and dissemination to an audience and target group typically not familiar with that kind of media. Thus, it involves an element of continuing e-learning for the beneficiaries, who are being challenged to broaden and advance their e-competences. The network's approach also supports self-initiated and self-directed learning.

There is particular need to address the work of people who have responsibility for coaching, mentoring and as peer group experts, both face to face in the workplace and as part of more distributed communities of practice. The Leonardo ICT and SME project has shown the growth of the use of ICT for just-in-time, peer group learning through distributed communities of practice on the Internet. This work would indicate a need for both initial and continuing training for trainers, linked to practice. As a key objective the network seeks to address this need.

The network also aims at a systematic documentation of tools and materials on non-formal training and learning with emphasising work-based learning and seeks to create linkages to other European projects and initiatives in the area. The TTPlus project on the Framework for

the Continuing Professional Development of trainers, for example, is linking the training of trainers with vocational and occupational learning within the wider field of vocational educational and training in Europe. However, rather than limiting the approach to the issue of the training of trainers as an issue for national systemic reform and provision, our approach is based on the idea of a community of practice of trainers and the development of a framework to facilitate integration within that community.

The network addresses three main target groups. Firstly, VET trainers and practitioners in companies and (private and public) institutions, which the network seeks to involve in the first place through the creation of national networks. Secondly, those responsible for training and training policies, i.e. individuals who design and implement training activities and/or are involved in the training of trainers, and decision makers who decide upon training programmes and policies. Third, all those who have an interest in the training of trainers and the broader VET community. Thus, the direct target group for the network are a range of actors including practitioners, managers and administrators, SME managers, curriculum developers and trainers of trainers, who cover a wide range of contexts and settings for both initial and continuing vocational education and training including vocational schools, apprenticeships, training centres, continuing vocational training, distance learning, work-based learning and informal learning. Further is the network also accessible to individuals who provide training such as trainers, tutors, coaches, mentors and 'peer group experts' in enterprises, workplaces and institutions. It directly addresses this group by providing tools for the implementation of training, other support measures and valuable resources and contact information at a national level.

The long-term beneficiaries are in the first place those responsible for training and training policies, because they are supported in their work and receive higher recognition. However, if trainers are more highly recognised, better qualified and more supported in their work, ultimately all those people who receive training in institutions and/or companies will benefit in the short, medium and longer term.

The outcomes and benefits of the network are cascaded through its activities (joint network activities and conferences) and the products that result from each activity and that are available electronically on the network's platform and in paper copies. These products are being widely distributed to the network members and beyond. Wide dissemination is ensured by the structure of the consortium partners and their established national/regional networks for which the partners function as a mediator, also in terms of national languages. Thus, the network approach seeks to reach 'trainers on the ground' and to facilitate at the same time a 'bottom up' approach by which practitioners down to the level of the company can share their experiences and practices. In their mediating role the consortium partners can facilitate that the results of the different network activities are used to inform national training policies and programmes. To the degree that these results are being used to support programming and policies at the national level the exploitation of the network outcomes can have lasting and sustainable effects.

Overall the network produces two working papers and three conference proceedings apart from the network flyer (available in 8 national languages) and the network platform (<http://www.trainersineurope.org/>), which constitutes the second important dissemination tool (complementing the national networks). The e-conferences can be replicated thus their dissemination effects are sustainable and ongoing.

A network takes time to develop, grow and produce effective outcomes. While most of the network partners have worked together in former projects so that a firm collaborative basis could be established, the community building process requires continuing efforts and support.

The first international online conference on the 'Training of Trainers' that was held in November 2008 has not only generated new contents and insight into the trainers professional development, but has also been an effective e-learning experience for the network partners and members and has significantly contributed to the community building process. Thus, one key aim of the second e-conference is to significantly increase the number of participants for this event.

Apart from evaluating the impact of the e-conference, the implementation of the network and the use of the platform are also regularly evaluated and monitored. Indicators that were used to monitor and assess the network's outcomes include i) the number of memberships; ii) how actively members are using the network, including seeking guidance and support; iii) average hits per month; and iv) how people engage in the online discussion forums.

In terms of generation of data and information, the network has successfully implemented a survey involving 738 VET practitioners from over 25 European countries. For the survey implementation, a questionnaire was translated into 18 national languages and implemented by the project partners using their national network contacts. This exercise has supported the network and the realisation of its objectives in several ways. First, it helped the partners to establish contacts to stakeholder institutions and VET practitioners in their country/country cluster which widens the outreach of the national networks. Second, it induced a process of reflection and discussion at the European level, supporting those ongoing activities of the network which are geared towards policy consultation and programming, particularly as concerns the training of trainers. Third, it induced a process of reflection and policy debate at the national level that the partners now want to strengthen. As a result of this positive impact, the partners decided to deepen the first analysis of survey data in a national perspective through engaging in a process of national contextualisation during the second half of the funding period. In addition, the network will continue the survey implementation and collecting responses until the summer of 2010 and conduct a new analysis.

Apart from the future network activities as outlined in the network proposal (e.g. the 2nd Joint Network Activity and organising the second e-conference in October 2009), the network in particular seeks to foster the community building process and ensure the sustainability of the network beyond the funding period. For this purpose, the network will in particular strengthen the development of the national networks, for example by establishing national sites for the different partner countries involved; strengthen the use of the platform by providing additional support; and explore different approaches towards the sustainability of the network both at the national and international level.

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1. Project Objectives

1.1 Contextualisation and background

Within the Lisbon strategy education and training are regarded as essential policy domains that should receive special attention in order to enhance competitiveness, economic growth and social integration for all European member states. Within this strategy, promoting opportunities for lifelong learning is one key priority. Increasing the quality of services provided by teachers and trainers thereby is regarded as an immediate contribution to fostering the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of opportunities for lifelong learning.

While this perspective underlines that VET teachers and trainers in initial vocational and further continuing training are key target groups when it comes to strengthening the quality of education and training systems in Europe, initiatives at the European level have so far mostly focused on formal learning and VET teachers. Also the indicators that have been developed to evaluate progresses in this area are targeted in the first place at formally recognised teaching personnel. The strategies of improving the situation of *VET trainers*, by contrast, remain uncertain to large extent. This is partly due to the fact that VET trainers and tutors tend to assume teaching and training responsibilities on a more informal basis. This is particularly case for learning and training processes that take place in companies.

In the course of the developing impact of lifelong learning leading to ever wider contexts and processes of learning, non-formal and work-based learning are being strengthened and increasingly recognised. Another impact of lifelong learning has been that the training process is diffusing into a wide range of related areas, resulting in increased numbers of people taking some role in training as part of their job profile. At the same time professional trainers are gaining new roles and responsibilities. This also refers to the developing of indicators to better monitor the situation of VET training personnel and identify future trends.

Apparently, the situation, work and competences of VET trainers are particularly difficult to assess, monitor and improve, because their roles and responsibilities are essentially linked to non-formal and work-based learning. As a result, the overall working conditions and qualification of VET trainers remain largely unregulated and highly diversified in most European countries. Across Europe the present training of trainer provision is inconsistent and fragmentary; a European framework for the training of trainers does not exist. As simply adapting indicators and analysis tools, which proved useful and applicable to the situation of teachers in general, basic and continuing (vocational) education to VET trainers is inappropriate in most cases, we are challenged to assess the situation of trainers in their respective contexts. Particular issues that need to be addressed include

- i) Determining the necessary competences and specific learning needs of trainers in basic and further vocational training, particularly in light of their changing roles and responsibilities;
- ii) Creating support offers for this growing target group;
- iii) Identifying possibilities for making the training profession more attractive;
- iv) Identifying examples of commendable practice;
- v) Identifying future trends in the area of VET trainers; and

- vi) Informing national and European policies how to better address trainers as a target group.

1.2 General aims and objectives

Acknowledging the growing importance of VET trainers – and the concurrent major gaps of information, research and support in this area – the European Commission and Cedefop recently launched a series of studies and activities to particularly address the situation and professional development of trainers. Among others, these included two studies on trainers in companies and private and public institutions (EAC/09/06 “Studies on Trainers in VET” – Lot 1 and Lot 2); the project “TTPlus – A Framework for the Continuing Professional Development of Trainers” funded under the EU’s *Leonardo da Vinci* programme; and various activities of the Training of Trainers Network (TTNet), which under the guidance of Cedefop conducted several studies on profiling VET professions. These different initiatives are partly being further developed, seeking to inform EU policies and create new supporting measures that take into account the particular needs and interests of VET trainers.

The **Network to Support Trainers in Europe** seeks to provide a forum to facilitate the integration of the different initiatives targeted at VET trainers that have been and are currently being carried out at the European and also national level, thereby supporting research and practice in training throughout Europe. Its objective is to provide access to people and information about research, policies and training practice, practical materials and a website and communication platform for the exchange of ideas and community building. Its activities shall further help to establish a European perspective on the situation and future professional development of VET trainers by including as many stakeholders, experts and practitioners as possible represented from across the 32 European countries and beyond. The immediate objectives of the network are to

- i) Generate data and information on the situation of trainers;
- ii) Provide an overview of materials and activities in the field of VET trainers across Europe and at the national/regional level;
- iii) Provide a platform for mutual exchange and community building among VET practitioners;
- iv) Enhance the visibility of the work and situation of VET trainers;
- v) Provide a framework of interaction to link research, policy and practice related to trainers;
- vi) Support the development of programmes and policies in the area; and
- vii) Inform European training policy, thereby linking the issues identified in the area of VET trainers with the European Qualification Framework and other initiatives implemented at the European level;
- viii) Improve the cooperation in the field of trainers between institutions and organisations including enterprises, social partners, academia and other relevant bodies throughout Europe.

1.3 Concrete objectives in relation to the Lifelong Learning Programme

In relation to the objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Network aims to

- Contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and the promotion of high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field of VET trainers;
- Support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning;
- Encourage best use of results, innovative products and processes and the exchange of good practice in the area of VET trainers, thereby improving the quality of education and training.
- Improve the quality and increase the volume of cooperation between institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, enterprises, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe;
- Support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices.

Another overarching objective of the Network is to **promote innovations in learning, approaches, communication and cooperation**. Therefore the structure and implementation of the Network involves several layers of innovation.

1. One level of innovation concerns the very **target group of the network** by addressing a key area of lifelong learning which has so far received relatively little attention and support at the European level despite the growing significance of the field and role of VET trainers across Europe. With its focus on VET trainers, the network enhances the visibility of training practitioners and their prospects for continuing learning and professional development in the future. The impact is awareness raising, visibility, higher recognition, improved programming and innovative policies in this area plus better cooperation and coordination between institutions and stakeholders.
2. Secondly, the platform and activities that the network implements effectively link a **bottom-up approach** with international and European perspectives on trainers in VET. Facilitated through the mediating function of the network consortium partners this approach is designed to address and support trainers, practitioners and multipliers at national, regional, sectoral and company level. Their active involvement and shared experience that reflect the practical work and situation of trainers in the respective contexts make a highly valuable contribution to the network and future programming at the European level. In addition, national educational programmes effecting VET trainers are being linked and better coordinated with initiatives at the European level. In a unique way, the network aims at combining practices in the field of VET trainers with concepts of how to operationalise those practices at an organisational, sectoral or national level and identify what kinds of institutions can support such processes in an active way. This approach supports the development of a 'roadmap' for the future professionalisation of VET trainers that can be transferred to both the national and

European level. In this way the sustainability of the network can be build into the national initiatives and programming in the area of VET trainers (see Chapter 5 for details).

3. Another innovative feature is that the network involves practitioners, experts and multipliers from at least 20 European countries. This broad outreach is ensured by the specific structure of the consortium by which partners operate at the level of country clusters. Thus, the design of the network is inclusive in nature not just from the part of its members – including non-European members and their experiences, which will be integrated into the e-platform of the network where possible – but also in terms of regional coverage within Europe. The **inclusive approach is facilitated by innovative e-tools**, the platform and several interactive online learning processes including e-conferences.

1.4 Objectives in relation to specific target groups

One immediate target group that benefits directly from the network and its activities is the growing number of partners and associated partners who are engaged in research, programming and policies for VET trainers in their respective countries. As a support structure the network directly supports them in their daily work.

In addition, the network seeks to involve a wide range of stakeholders, experts, multipliers, institutions and decision makers, but is also designed to be of benefit to managers, trainers and other VET practitioners down to the level of training practice in companies; institutions and vocational schools. While the structure of the consortium ensures the involvement of at least 20 European countries, the bottom-up approach of the network facilitates that also practitioners can be actively involved (see Chapter 2 for details). Community building among VET practitioners is a key objective of the network.

The consortium partners seek to effectively mediate between the national and European level as well as between practice and policy thus fostering a European dialogue on issues related to VET trainers. Dialogue and exchange is, on the one hand, supported by innovative e-learning tools, which all network members and other people involved benefit from (see Chapter 2 for details). By applying those tools the network seeks to introduce new media and approaches to communication and exchange to a target group, which is so far largely unfamiliar with that tool. In this way the network is piloting an innovative instrument of wide outreach, which at the same time carries an inherent learning component for the users and beneficiaries.

2. Project Approach

In order to reach its different target groups, the Network operates at various levels and along a differentiated and multi-layered work programme. Its main approaches consist of

- i) Enforced collaboration between the network partners as well as with other initiatives and projects that have VET trainers as a target group;
- ii) Introduction and implementation of innovative e-tools for effective communication and exchange between the partners, network members and broader VET community;
- iii) 'Bottom-up approach' to effectively involve stakeholders down to the level of VET practitioners;
- iv) Combination of methods to link research, practice and policies in the area of VET trainers at the national and European level.

In the following it is explained how the different approaches are realised in relation to the multi-level operation of the network.

2.1 Operation at the international level

Activities at the international level are in the first place targeted to support researchers, programme managers and decision makers working in the area of VET trainers at an international and national level. Those network activities are mainly carried out in English.

- The Network has established a **web-based platform** (www.trainersineurope.org) that creates linkages, synergy effects and mutual benefits of the different European, national and regional research and development initiatives in the area of VET trainers working in companies as well as institutional and other contexts. As a content management system the platform adds value to those initiatives, ensuring the further dissemination and outreach of their results under a structured and effectively organised system. Materials, tools, outcomes, resources and contacts are being presented, structured and disseminated to a wider target audience, which is in the first place researchers, programme managers and policy decision makers.

A key feature of the platform is a forum for mutual exchange and learning experience which emphasises the sharing of knowledge and experiences, good practice and innovation in the area of VET trainers. Knowledge sharing and mutual exchange are further facilitated through several e-communication activities the network organises for its partners and members.

- The implementation of **two international e-conferences** is another innovative feature that the network is piloting. The first conference, which addressed the topic "The training of trainers" took place from 5-6 November 2008 and attracted about 80 participants.¹ An

¹ At <http://www.trainersineurope.org/activities/conference/recordings/> contributions to the conference and subsequent discussions can be fully replayed. The conference exhibition is accessible under <http://trainersineurope.pbworks.com/>).

evaluation to the conference is presented in Chapter 7 of this report. The rationale for organising e-conferences is outreach, inclusion and innovation. In addition to the two e-conferences the network organises one international (face-to-face) conference towards the end of the funding period. The rationale for the final conference is visibility and political impact.

- Two **joint network activities** are being organised to link strategies and innovation in the area of VET trainers between the national and European level. Both these activities have a strong research component. They directly address the objective to contribute to high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field of VET trainers.

The **first joint network activity** (priority in 2008) was targeted at generating new data and information to predict needs and trends on the situation of VET trainers. It consisted of implementing a survey to assess trainers' work, qualification and continuing learning in about 20 European countries. Concerning the job profile we asked about the typical work tasks of a trainer, while skills and competences of training practitioners were addressed by the question "What kinds of knowledge, skills and competences are required of trainers?" Other aspects that were addressed was the evaluation of training, trainers' employment situation and what kinds of opportunities for continuing professional development they have. The survey applied a standardised questionnaires targeted at practitioners. In order to reach this target group the questionnaire was translated into 18 different national languages. For the first statistical data analysis 738 questionnaires from 28 European countries were considered. The network partners decided to keep the survey open and collect additional responses for the remaining project period. A second statistical analysis will be carried out in the summer of 2010.

The **second joint network activity** (priority in 2009) identifies, features and analyses good practice of innovation in programmes and policies in the area of VET trainers. This activity in particular supports the development of a plan of actions and policy to improve the work, situation and professional development of trainers, discussing and modelling the transferability of good practice examples to other areas, sectors and national contexts. One aim deriving from this approach is to model alternative approaches towards a European dimension or framework, thereby taking into account current EU frameworks and initiatives such as the European Qualification Framework. The thematic focus is closely connected to broader lifelong learning policies and actions to see how those aims at the level of the role of trainers can best be met. At the international level this activity involves several topic-related online discussion forums which are being organised among the network partners and the broader network community. This complements other national-level activities (see further below for details).

2.2 Operation at the national/regional level

Apart from operating at the international level the network supports and builds communities of VET experts and training practitioners at the national level. This is a key complementary structure mainly supported by the networks' core and associated partners who develop the network in their respective country or country cluster. The national level activities are realised in

the national languages. They are targeted at VET institutions, national experts, researchers, programme managers but also training practitioners from a particular language community. Operation at the national level is based on the following approaches:

- All partners of the network **establish a network of training experts and practitioners in their respective country or country cluster**. For better outreach several partners have cooperating partner institutions in neighbouring countries. For example, the Estonian partner establishes the network in the Baltic countries, the Finnish partner in the Scandinavian countries, the Dutch partner in the BENELUX countries, etc. All network partners manage cooperation and information exchange with key experts, training and other institutions, companies and VET practitioners from their respective country or country cluster at the national, regional and sectoral level. This involves organising national or regional exchange through meetings or workshops; participating in relevant national activities on trainers; presenting the network to stakeholders; actively engaging in the policy and development process targeted at trainers in their respective country; and engaging in other related activities at the national level. It also involves facilitating exchange between the respective national/regional network and other national level and international activities of the Network to Support Trainers in Europe. Some partners operate with a registering tool in order to establish databases of their network members (such as Poland). The members are then being contacted to get involved in the Network activities that are being organised at the international level such as the e-conferences. Other partners work through already established networks such as the national TTNNet (Germany, Czech Republic). Also the survey was implemented by using the national networks that the partners establish and work with. The second joint network activity is equally being implemented by initiating a reflection and validation process at the national/regional level.
- The **bottom-up approach** particularly seeks to involve training practitioners in the activities of the network. This, on the one hand, is facilitated through the different activities that the partners realise at the national/regional level. On the other hand the international activities of the Network make sure that practitioners are being encouraged to get involved. For example, on the platform registered members are encouraged to share their views in their own national language. A considerable number of members are training practitioners. Through its international activities the Network seeks to integrate elements that are particularly targeted to training practitioners. For example, besides the regular conference programme of the first e-conference an exhibition area featured projects, good practice examples and other activities using multimedia such as video or slide shows (<http://trainersineurope.pbworks.com/>). This multi-lingual exhibition area was particularly targeted at trainers who may find it difficult to follow the regular conference programme in English. In addition, conference participation could be certified in case practitioners wanted to have it acknowledged as a training activity.
- In the second project year the Network puts emphasis on developing **national sites** that shall help develop the network at the national/regional level and facilitate communication and exchange in the national languages (see Chapter 5 for details). Those sites are intended to be an 'add on' to an already existing site, which is run and maintained by a national body or institution. This approach shall ensure ownership and sustainability at the national level. The

key aim is to make the national sites operating independently from the Network to Support Trainers in Europe platform and European project funding. The national sites will facilitate

- Communication and exchange in the national languages among practitioners;
- Linkages to relevant national websites that could be of interest to VET practitioners;
- Linkages to international relevant websites and platforms (such as Network platform) that could be of interest to VET practitioners;
- Information about relevant national and international activities and initiatives that could be of interest to trainers;
- The creation and further development of the national network. For this purpose partners are advised to work with a register.

2.3 Profiling research and development in the area of VET trainers

The two **joint network activities** are designed to foster research and development in the area of trainers.

The **survey conducted with practitioners** in the framework of the **first joint network activity** generated new data and information to predict needs and trends on the situation and qualification of VET trainers. The first statistical data analysis considered 738 responses from 28 European countries. The network partners decided to keep the survey open and collect additional responses for the remaining project period. A second analysis will be carried out in the summer of 2010. In addition, some of the network partners are interested in carrying out national level analysis of the data obtained and engage in further contextualisation of the results. So far the analysis has focused on a European perspective. It is currently explored what kinds of resources and support are needed in order to facilitate a more in-depth national level analysis and whether this can be realised in the framework of the network activities.

Methods of the survey

The survey was undertaken applying a standardized questionnaire . The questionnaire was developed by the Network coordinator in collaboration with the Network's core partners reverting to experiences that derived from the survey conducted in the framework of the EUROTRAINER study in 2007. Based on this first survey with national experts and multipliers the questionnaire was adjusted, shortened and new questions were added. Overall, the questionnaire for practitioners consisted of preliminary questions on the respondent's position and background; 20 numbered questions on the work environment, job tasks, respondents' competences and their engagement in continuing learning; and an extra sheet on which contact details could be provided on a voluntary basis if participants wished to receive further information on the survey results and network activities. These contact details were separated from the other sections before starting the data analysis.

Apart from some exceptions all questions offered the opportunity for multiple answers. In most cases respondents were asked to choose from a range of answer categories that could not be ranked in any possible way. This means that the data generated consists of dichotomised variables with a nominal measurement level. In some cases, e.g. for certain evaluative questions, an ordinal level could be achieved. For the presentation of results multiple answers imply that the percentages of cases tend to add up to more than 100 per cent. For the sake of

clarity the presentation of results concentrate on the percentages of *responses* instead of cases, except for those cases where multiple answers were not possible. In addition to the 20 numbered questions, the questionnaire also included some open text questions, which, however, were left unanswered by the majority of respondents.

The questionnaire, which was first available in English and German, was pretested in Germany in March and April 2008. During the pretest 17 filled questionnaires were collected. Subsequent to some further adjustments and refinements the questionnaire was translated by the network partners into Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. The translation into national languages was a key means to actually reach the target group of training practitioners. In these 18 different language versions the questionnaire was then distributed by the network partners within their local networks. It was disseminated in paper version and was made available online via the SurveyMonkey tool (www.surveymonkey.com) in June 2008. Ultimately it was this online version that attracted the majority of respondents. Only about 10 per cent of 738 filled questionnaires were returned as paper versions and entered into the data set by the Network coordinator. In addition, some more paper questionnaires were collected by the project partners who entered the responses into the corresponding SurveyMonkey tool.

For producing the first evaluation data collection was closed on 27 October 2008. The responses were downloaded as separate Excel files for each language version from the SurveyMonkey site, merged into one table and recoded. After separating the contact data of the respondents the completed Excel file was imported into SPSS in order to carry out the statistical analysis.

While Spain generated over 100 responses most countries secured between 20 and 60 responses. Since in some countries the number of respondents was even lower than twenty, most of the analysis was being conducted at the European level, i.e. not differentiating between results obtained for the different countries. Also, the nature of the data suggests restricting the analysis to calculation of frequencies and descriptive statistics rather than undertaking a complex statistical analysis. For a selective international comparative presentation of results for some topics five countries were chosen, which, on the one hand, represent different VET traditions and, on the other hand, secured a relatively high number of responses. Concretely, national level results were being presented and discussed for Austria, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands and Spain.

The implementation of the network survey followed a coordinated but decentralised approach by which the distribution of the questionnaire at the regional level was within the responsibility of the project partners. Accordingly, the prospective respondents were selected and contacted by the national partners through their regional networks and were either presented the paper questionnaire or asked to fill in the online version. Respondents were also encouraged to draw the attention of their colleagues to the survey to encourage wider participation. The resulting selective sampling strongly limits how wider conclusions and implications can be drawn from the survey results. As the methodology did not follow random sampling (i.e. a sampling strategy by which the probability to be included in the sample is the same for all individuals) the sample is not representative. Especially the approach of an online survey where the opportunity to fill in a questionnaire was merely announced to the target group is inherently in favour of respondents with a more active response attitude.

Since the survey is not representative, it does not allow for the application of inferential procedures, but must rather be considered explorative in nature. The results can only tentatively

indicate certain trends. However, despite these limitations the survey produced some interesting findings that can feed into further considerations, debates and policy developments that may support VET trainers in the future. The network partners also decided to keep the survey open as an ongoing activity so that more responses are being collected to facilitate a second evaluation towards the end of 2010.

The **second joint network activity** (priority in 2009) is designed to identify, feature and analyse good practice of innovation in programmes and policies in the area of VET trainers. One aim of this activity is to model alternative approaches towards the development of a European dimension or framework, thereby taking into account current EU frameworks and initiatives such as the European Qualification Framework. This activity is organised at different levels:

- At the **international level** the activity involves several topic-related and moderated online discussion forums (in English) which are being organised among the network partners and the broader network community. The topics are being prepared by input papers and the outcomes of the discussions are being summarised for broader dissemination and validation purposes. Continuing discussions and validation are being carried out at the national level (in different national languages) through the national/regional networks coordinated by the partners.
- Complementary to those general discussions and exchange of experience all network partners develop **national case studies** that feature examples of innovation and/or good practice. Those case studies may either refer to national or sectoral approaches, company approaches or innovative ideas that are developed at an institutional or organisational level. The case study format shall strengthen the research component of the network activities. Each case study will consist of i) a description of the example/case with some contextual information – How, when and why did it start? How does it work? Whom is it for? What are the key objectives? How is it implemented? Who benefits from it? What is the impact at the practical and policy level? ii) an in-depth analysis that assesses the advantages and disadvantages of the presented case; and iii) broader contextualisation and potentials for transferability to other countries/sectors/companies/ institutions etc. The network partners consider a book publication for the presentation and analysis of the case studies.

2.4 Cooperation and cross-fertilization with other related projects and programmes

The Network to Support Trainers in Europe is a direct result of two studies on trainers in VET that the European Commission commissioned in 2006 and the strong interest of the partners involved in those studies to continue their partnership and engagement in the area of VET trainers. One major reason for the two studies had been the fact that very little data and material were available on the situation, work and qualification of trainers despite their emerging role as key actors of lifelong learning. Against this situation, the European Union identified the need to put programmes and actions in place, which on the one hand can generate more information on the situation of trainers and their training needs, and, on the other hand, can support the development of strategies and policies to meet actual and projected future needs.

As a consequence several programmes and projects have been launched and supported since the Network was conceived. This development puts the activities of the Network into a broader picture and once more underlines the umbrella function that the Networks seeks to realise to create linkages between those different projects, fostering their effective exploitation and dissemination to a broader target audience. Some projects and initiatives with which the Network facilitates cross-fertilisation include:

- LOT 1: EUROTRAINER – Studies on Trainers in Enterprises (2006-2007), which was funded by the European Commission in order to generate some first data and information to get an overview of the situation, work and qualification of trainers in enterprises;
- LOT 2 (2006-2007): Studies on Trainers in Private and Public Institutions, which was conceptualised as a parallel study to the EUROTRAINER study addressing the target group of trainers in institutions;
- TNet activities and studies on ‘Defining VET Professions’ Lot 1 and Lot 2 (2007-2008) funded by Cedefop;
- *Leonardo da Vinci* project TTPlus – A Framework for the Continuing Professional Development of Trainers (2006-2008), which involved a qualitative study in 6 European countries on the professionalisation of trainers working in different contexts;
- VET Teachers and Trainers – Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe (2008-2009), which involves a series of consultation seminars with national experts across the 32 European countries to validate findings of former studies and to inform European policies;
- *Leonardo da Vinci* project TrainerGuide (2008-2010), which aims to develop an online handbook for the training and practice of VET practitioners;
- The Changing Roles and Competences of VET Teachers and Trainers (2009-2010) funded by Cedefop, which involves a qualitative empirical investigation across 9 European countries;
- *Leonardo da Vinci* project QUADULTRAINER (2008-2010), which seeks to develop qualification standards for trainers across 7 European countries for the banking and financial sector.

Linkages and synergy effects between those different projects and initiatives are ensured by

- The **platform**, which under the section ‘related projects’ informs about those initiatives and creates web-links to the project websites where they exist;
- The **community forum**, which encourages project partners and other individuals involved in those projects to share their experiences;
- The **partnership**: all of these projects involve partner institutions that are also represented in the network consortium;
- The **active/formal cooperation** that the Network has established with some of the projects such as with the TrainerGuide, QUADULTRAINER or TTPlus project.
- Connecting the partners involved in those different projects and initiatives at the **national/regional level for collaboration** within the existing national networks.

2.5 Support for VET practitioners

One key objective and defined target group of the Network are training practitioners and programme managers. Those should be supported in their continuing learning and everyday work practice. Consequently, the Network places a particular focus on how to reach this target group and develop and/or make available practical tools that can be used by practitioners in their work practice. The TrainerGuide project, for example, is currently developing such a practice tool in form of a digital handbook that will be available in several national languages and respect adaptation to different training and national contexts. In addition to linking to such practice-oriented projects the network aims at a systematic documentation of tools and materials on mainly non-formal training and learning with an emphasis on work-based learning. This approach underlines the essentially practice-based environment in which most trainers operate.

Trainers may themselves pursue professional development through informal learning and through e-learning, using different frameworks for forms of recognition of that learning. Here, the approach of fostering the development of a community of practice of trainers (see below for details) and a framework of peer review to facilitate external recognition and integration within that community was for example presented by the TTPlus project and is also taken up by the network partners. Topics related to this approach include: portfolio building and ePortfolios for trainers; recognition of prior learning; support trainers in their work practice; enhance trainers' own commitment to learning and support trainers to assess their own needs and skill development.

As a step towards supporting trainers in their work practice the first joint network activity involved the development of a **self-assessment tool for VET practitioners working in different contexts**. This was considered appropriate against the key role of self-initiated and self-directed continuing learning and professional development of trainers. Indeed, several studies confirm that while the intensity of learning activities may vary from trainer to trainer, intrinsic motivation such as becoming a better trainer or personal development objectives are the most important drivers for their engagement in continuing learning. That the continuing professional development of training practitioners is predominantly driven by personal interest and intrinsic motivation and largely relies on self-initiative is a common finding across several empirical investigations that have been conducted.

Against this background, the self-assessment tool is targeted at helping VET practitioners to identify where their strengths and weaknesses in terms of different skill facets are. The tool was initially developed in Finland for different VET practitioners, in particular VET teachers. For the purpose of matching the Network's objectives, target groups and overall framework, the Finish tool was translated into English and adapted for the target group of trainers working in a company. For in-company trainers, the tool helps them to identify skills development and possible shortfalls in terms their *vocational skills, guidance skills, motivation and self development skills* and their *work community skills and knowledge*. In the tool, those for skill dimensions are first described and should then be rated from the individual practitioner's point of view. Then the results are being transferred into an excel sheet/grid for further analysis. The tool is described in Chapter 3 and is added as a product to this report. It is a tool that can be applied online (<http://openetti.aokk.hamk.fi/seppoh/Osaamismittarit/english.htm>) or in paper format.

While the tool was finalised early in 2009, it is so far only implemented in Finland. The network partners are keen to not just 'provide' the self-assessment tool through the platform and its national networks, but also to test and validate it in the different national contexts. How this can be realised in practice and what resources are needed in order to carry out a validation process (e.g. in terms of translating the tool into several national languages) still needs to be decided.

2.6 Community building

Communities of practice are a strong driver that fosters learning and professional development. Connecting to the Network's bottom-up approach and the role that communities of practice have for the development of expertise and professionalism, community building is one key objective and approach of the Network. However, community building is a complex and difficult process, particularly when parts of the target group do not identify themselves as belonging to a community of training practitioners.

Essentially, the network addresses three types of target groups that are being encouraged to engage in a process of mutual understanding, learning and exchange.

1. The first group are people responsible for planning, organising and assessing the work and qualification of trainers. Those are predominantly *researchers, policy decision makers, programme managers and other experts*. Their knowledge about training practice varies, but their awareness about the key and in some respects changing role of trainers in the learning process is high.
2. The second group comprises what the network considers the *professional trainers*. Those are practitioners who train trainers, full-time trainers, independent trainers and VET practitioners who work for private training providers, among others. Sometimes under this category we can also address VET teachers. All those training professionals have in common that they are aware of their training role and the requirements in terms of the responsibilities, skills and tasks related to it. As training professionals they identify with their work and actively engage in making sure that they meet the expected training standards and expectations. They have developed a vocational identity as a trainer and are aware of the learning and exchange processes that are necessary in order to become a proficient trainer. They commonly are well familiar with training practice.
3. Thirdly there are large numbers of people who assume *some kinds of training function or roles in different contexts* – partly with the same levels of responsibilities and identical skill requirements that apply to the professional trainers, but who are not aware that in this role they act as trainers. Obviously, employees who assume training functions without obtaining a certain status, recognition or designation as 'trainer' or 'tutor' will not develop an identity as a trainer. Thus, particularly part-time trainers in companies do not regard themselves as trainers but as ordinary workers for whom passing on skills and knowledge and facilitate learning processes constitute one feature of their regular work. Those trainers do not tend to develop a vocational identity as trainers and thus will not feel addressed by activities or issues related to this target group. This particularly affects their continuing professional and skill development. For example, courses for trainers will not reach those employees and skilled workers who do not consider themselves as trainers unless company management makes them aware of their special role. However, even people at management level who are

responsible for organising training may not be aware of the professional development needs of their training staff or the key role they themselves play in the learning process. In the area of trainers, thus, raising awareness is a big concern and it is not clear to what extent the community building approach can at all reach this group and impact on this process.

During the first 18 months of the project period the Network has been relatively successful in strengthening community building among researchers and experts and to a certain degree professional trainers. Community building is on the one hand supported by the strong partnership of the network (see Chapter 4 for details) and its vital exchange and intensified cooperation with related projects and initiatives. The platform and the forum, on the other hand, increasingly involve professional trainers who use the platform to exchange experiences with other trainers and experts. However, apart from the platform it has proved difficult to fully involve VET practitioners in the different network activities at the international level despite different activities that were particularly targeted at practitioners (such as the exhibition during the e-conference). We recognise that language and lack of ICT-experience here are major obstacles. At the national level, however, practitioners are increasingly getting involved and cooperation structures with different stakeholder groups (such as the social partners in Spain, for example) or companies also facilitate the gradual involvement of part-time trainers at the local level.

Apart from partners' national level activities, so far the e-conference had the strongest impact on the community building aspect (see further below and Chapter 7).

2.7 Apply and promote innovations in e-learning in the area of trainers

A key approach of the Network is piloting innovative e-based tools and features linked to e-learning amongst its partners and other target groups. Those tools are used i) for information exchange; ii) promoting trainers in lifelong learning; iii) e-learning of partners and network members; and iv) project monitoring. They include:

2.7.1 The network platform

The network platform is developed and maintained by the UK project partner. It is the portal for the network and facilitates communication and exchange among its partners and members. The platform provides functionality for:

- a) messaging
- b) blogging – each network member who registers on the site is offered their own blog
- c) shared collaborative work through a wiki
- d) News feeds and widgets to link to aggregated content
- e) User generated metadata
- f) Static web pages

The platform fully supports multimedia including video and podcasting and is capable of adaptation to support social software. It provides easy integration with Flickr (for sharing photographs) Slideshare (for sharing presentations) and other services. It is based on Open Source Software. Any other software for the platform is developed under the Open Source general Public Licence and content is licensed under Creative Commons. With those media, the

platform is organised as an advanced knowledge management system piloting innovative e-features for knowledge sharing and distribution.

2.7.2 Online conferences

The Network organises two online conferences. One was organised in November 2008 and the second one will be organised in October 2009. These conferences utilise two software programmes: Elluminate and Moodle. Elluminate supports synchronous audio and white boarding. It provides support for moderators to facilitate online discussions. The system can be run on low bandwidth connections and is capable of handling over 500 simultaneous connections. Elluminate is being used for the main conference speakers to make their presentations. Moodle is an open source Virtual Learning Environment. Moodle supports a wide range of e-learning functions. Moodle is being used for asynchronous discussions between presentations. With the medium of e-conferences the network introduces an innovative tool of exchange and dissemination to an audience that is typically not familiar with that kind of media. A full report and evaluation of the first e-conference is provided in Chapter 7.

2.7.3 Flash-meetings

Since the network started the partners have regularly engaged in online meetings, so-called 'flash-meetings'. So far the network partners have organised and engaged in 8 flash-meetings which took place between February 2008 and April 2009. Each meeting lasted for about 2 hours. Most partners have overcome the initial technical difficulties and the quality and effectiveness of the flash-meetings have increased enormously. Until December 2008 the flash-meetings were mainly used for up-dating each other on experiences of the network implementation in terms of how the different network activities are progressing. This also included the planning of the next steps of the activities and reflecting and discussing about the results ('products'). The meetings were further used for practical and administrative matters and for project monitoring. For these purposes the meetings have been extremely useful. An agenda is send out before each meeting and minutes are commonly being prepared (provided in the annex of the confidential part of the report). In addition, partners can replay the meetings, which is particularly useful for those partners who were not able to attend.

During the second partner meeting (September 2008) the partners suggested to also use the flash-meetings for discussing particular topics more in-depth, that is introduce a content-related focus to those meetings. Content-focused flash-meetings were piloted in 2009. Those meetings require a higher degree of preparation. Papers or topics for discussion are therefore being sent in advance to the network partners. Sometimes a partner also writes a short introduction as input to the discussion. Since April 2009 this approach has been linked to the joint discussions at the international level that form part of the 2nd network activity (see above).

Our experience indicates that the technology applied for flash-meetings is more appropriate for clearly structured technical meetings than lengthy online discussions. What might be the best arrangement or setting for realising an effective exchange at both levels – for administrative purposes and for topic-centred discussions – still needs to be explored further.

2.7.4 General considerations

With the different e-features in combination the network introduces innovative tools of exchange, communication and dissemination to an audience typically not familiar with that kind of media. This also includes the network partners who were introduced to the e-based approach of flash-meetings initially for project monitoring purposes. The implementation of these different features involves an element of continuing e-based learning for the partners and beneficiaries, who are continuously challenged to broaden and advance their e-competences. With this approach the network also supports self-initiated and self-directed learning. In addition, particular training sessions have been conducted during the (face-to-face) partner meetings on different e-functions of the platform. One flash-meeting was organised using the Elluminate software to familiarise partners with this tool in order to run the e-conference smoothly. Partners have also been trained in online moderation. Ongoing distance technical support is being provided to the partners to get used to the technologies applied for the flash-meetings, but also for using skype. Individual one-by-one partner monitoring was realised in month 16. An effect has been that all partners now have a skype account which they use for collaborating activities among themselves, for example to work together on particular components of the network activities. Finally, technical support is provided to all network members who have difficulties in using the platform, both in form of help tools that are available for downloading, but also in form of personalised user support, which is provided by one colleague from the UK project partner. This person joined the project particularly to facilitate online moderation and provide 1st level user support on an ongoing basis.

Experience shows that the network partners are getting increasingly confident in using the new media and e-tools. This helps not only the effective implementation of the network project, but also has wide-reaching spill off effects for other collaboration projects. In addition, it brings the technology closer to the VET practitioners as they are getting gradually involved in the network activities.

Another key aspect and rationale of the e-features that the network implements have been the **continuing learning effect**: all activities that are online based are being fully recorded and are available for replay at any time. This is helpful for all network partners and members for following-up on how the network is developing. In addition, the e-features, in particular the e-conferences, support the participation of non-European experts and VET practitioners thus underlining the global dimension of the target area.

2.8 Evaluation strategy and results

So far the network has been fully monitored by its consortium partners without relying on any kind of external evaluation or monitoring, for example through a steering committee or advisory board. The partners share their engagement in critically reflecting upon the network activities and the obtained results to a fairly equal degree. This critical reflection process is supported by the regular flash-meetings, which facilitate exchange on the effectiveness of network implementation on an ongoing basis. Those meetings take place about every 6-8 weeks. In addition, the partner meetings are also used to evaluate the structure, strategies, activities and outcomes of the past and current joint activities. This has led to some adjustments for example as concerns the platform development and joint network activities (for details see Chapter 8 and the confidential part of the report). In addition, the evaluation strategy, which the network implements, comprises the components described below.

2.8.1 **Assessing the numbers and activities of network partners and members**

The network monitors how many people engage in the network activities. As concerns the **partnership**, the numbers of the partners engaging in the network has been constantly increasing since the network started. This is despite the fact that the number of members of the core consortium cannot be increased (i.e. those partners who are funded in accordance with the contractual agreement). First, the growing partnership is due to more colleagues from the side of the network partners getting involved, i.e. the number of individuals per partner organisation who support the network activities. Second, during the reporting period the network has sub-contracted three more partners that now establish a national network in their country and fully engage in the network activities at the international level. Third, an increasing number of other collaborating partners seek to get actively involved in the network activities and establish some kind of formal collaboration. This growing interest and engagement has a qualitative and quantitative impact on the network.

In addition, it is monitored how many people register on the platform, post blogs and exchange experiences through using the platform and subscribe to receive regular information on the network activities. People who register on the platform and actively participate in the community building process are referred to as **network members**. By May 2009 about 100 people had registered on the network platform (see Report on Web-based Platform and Tools in the annex/supporting documents).

2.8.2 **Evaluation and monitoring of use of the network platform**

One indicator of how the platform is actually used is the number of memberships (see above) and how actively members are using the platform. Another indicator is the monitoring of hits, i.e. how many people are getting to the side to retrieve information (by downloading documents and tools, for example), establish contacts or effectively participate in the network activities, online discussion forums and so on. Monitoring the number of hits makes it possible to distinguishing between the effectiveness of the different sections of the platform (i.e. which sections are more useful and interesting than others) and national interest and relevance (i.e. from which country the side is being accessed). Number of participants in the e-conferences and outreach is also being monitored and evaluated (see Chapter 7 for details).

2.8.3 **Evaluation of the e-conferences**

The first e-conference that took place in November 2008 was evaluated by means of a survey that participants were asked to fill out after the conference had been concluded. A full report and evaluation of the e-conference is provided under Chapter 7 of this report. The questionnaire forms part of the annexes as supporting document.

2.8.4 **Evaluation of the implementation and impact of the network**

Towards the end of the reporting period a **questionnaire** was distributed among the project partners to evaluate the following aspects of the network (see annex of confidential part):

- Background of the partners in terms of their former involvement in VET projects, e-learning projects and networks;

- Organisation and management of the network in terms of transparency, information exchange, quality of project documentation, support and guidance provided, partner meetings and cooperation structures.
- The network methodology and approach including the different network activities.
- The effectiveness of network implementation in terms of reaching the target group and supporting partners in their work.

An assessment reveals that the project management (transparency, information exchange, quality of project documentation, support and guidance provided) is rated very positively. Here particularly the technical support could still be improved as should the functionalities and actual usage of the platform. Also the information provided on the platform including materials, tools and links to other projects should be enhanced. Partner stated that the activities of the Network are very relevant for their work and considered the balance between training practitioners and experts/researchers/policy makers as target groups to be about right. A key issue was that the development of the national/regional networks should be fostered. Some comments provided by partners are presented below:

- The **community building** is still not very effective. One problem is the diversity of the target group that involves practitioners as well as institutions and companies, for example. It might not be realistic that the network can be equally useful for all these different groups. Particularly as concerns the international activities of the network it remains difficult to actually get individual trainers involved. One main obstacle is the language. Another obstacle is that it is difficult to attract VET teachers or trainers to actually go and look for information on such kinds of platforms because they are not used to it, but also because they lack time. Another obstacle is that even for most of the partners this type of activity is new, particularly the idea of using an online platform for coordinating activities. Partners are only slowly getting used to it, particularly through the flash-meetings. Overall the network offers an excellent opportunity to share best practise in the area of VET training and to understand and learn from each other. Also the platform is a good tool only that the network still needs to find the most effective way to encourage information sharing and that partners need to use the platform more. Technical problems are also seen as an obstacle to effective information exchange and discussing matters thoroughly.
- While there is a very strong focus on sharing ideas (e.g. on the platform) it is not always clear WHAT should be shared. Too much emphasis is placed on the process and too little on the content. It should be more closely explored what we want to share and why. Besides sharing ideas and good practice examples we could also share more conceptual thoughts on the role of VET in society, for example.
- It needs to be more strongly emphasised what the **added value of the network** is since in some contexts there is an overlap with other (national or transnational/European) already existing networks.
- While the monitoring and planning of activities is rated very positively, the partners propose intensified efforts for the development and **promotion of the national networks**. Overall a stronger focus should be placed on expanding the network and making it more attractive for training practitioners. National/regional meetings could contribute to strengthening the development of the national networks as well as collaboration with related networks (e.g. TT-

Net).

- Partners responsible for a country cluster find it difficult to extend the network in their neighbouring countries. Thus, apart from more strongly supporting the development of the national networks we should also find a strategy to better support the development of regional networks in the case of country clusters. Also here language is barrier.
- Despite these difficulties it should be acknowledged that the network is still in its developmental phase and piloting a new approach. The overall organisation and approach is very good.

High points

- Collaboration between network members, online conference, online flash meetings: The e-conference was a really innovative and useful activity, which can be further exploited; the flash meetings turn out to be quite effective (despite technical problems); they help the network to stay together on a minimum cost and incite cooperation. Overall, the communication between the partners is extremely good.
- Using new forms and tools for enhanced communication between partners is a learning experience for all partners.
- Most of the partners are deeply engaged in training-related sectors, from different points of view. This way the network has the potential to cover various parts of this undiscovered area, based on the partners' experience, which can bring added value to the network and utilize it both at the national and international level.

What to do differently

- Develop shared mailing lists from the start of the project. Involve all partners in making regular presentations through flash-meetings and partner meetings in terms of content as basis for further discussion.
- Focus more on practical issues and use for training practitioners to motivate them to take part in the platform and in the other network activities, particularly regarding the exchange of experiences from training practice and meeting their needs for training.
- More face-to-face meetings would be helpful for the cooperation process.

2.8.5 Evaluation of the implementation and impact of the network

For the second half of the funding period **two additional evaluation approaches** will be implemented. The first evaluation component will be related to getting feed-back from the national VET stakeholders and practitioners who are in the first place involved in the network activities through the respective national networks. On the one hand, from the national perspective it will be evaluated how the network is being implemented at the national/regional level and how useful the network activities implemented at the international level and the platform are for the end users, taking into consideration its accessibility, outreach, information provided, user-friendliness, etc. The second evaluation component will be introduced through an external evaluation supported by an expert of quality and evaluation monitoring. This expert applies of range of evaluation tools which are currently being explored for their appropriateness to assess the network in progress. With this external evaluation we seek to increase the

effectiveness of the network implementation considering the particular nature and developmental process of a network which differs in many ways from regular research and development projects (see also Chapter 8).

2.9 Dissemination and exploitation strategy and activities

The dissemination and exploitation strategies of the network are at the heart of the network activities, because everything that the network partners do is ultimately geared towards ensuring the network's sustainability, i.e. that the network is being continued after the funding period ends. In a way one could even argue that since the network is not geared towards a final product or result (cf. Chapter 8) but towards strengthening an ongoing process of exchange, community building, provision of guidance and informing policy that is mainly based on expansion and involving an ever greater number of people, it is essentially a dissemination project, which can only be successful when each activity is fully exploited so that the results can inspire and support the ongoing related activities. This means that each network activity has a built-in dissemination component and comprises a built-in linkage to the other network activities through an element of continuation (cf. Chapter 3). At the same time the activities reports of the network partners (provided as annexes to the confidential part of the report) make clear that a one-for-all dissemination strategy that can be applied in all national contexts does not exist. Rather at the national level partners develop very different strategies to ensure outreach and the sustainability of their national/regional network. Such a decentralised approach is fully supported by the network coordinator and the decentralised structure of the network.

Whilst most of the strategies have already been described under the previous sections, they are briefly summarised again taking into account the particular aspect of dissemination and exploitation.

2.9.1 Dissemination and exploitation through activities at the international level

At the international level (cf. Chapter 2.1), all network activities support the wider dissemination of the network and the exploitation of its results. The platform and the community building process in particular are geared towards making the network known to a wide range of representatives of the target groups and encourage them to register at the platform to receive information and news on a regular basis. For the second project period it is planned to issue a regular newsletter to all those registered as members on the platform to inform them about ongoing activities, related projects, results of related projects and the particular network activities and activities that are happening in the discussion forum, among others. Apart from the platform, the e-conference so far has had the greatest impact in terms of effective dissemination and attracting people to visit the platform and actively engage in the network activities. Since the e-conference has been so popular (c.f. Chapter 7), great efforts are being made to significantly increase the number of participants for the second e-conference that will be held in October 2009.

2.9.2 Dissemination and exploitation through the national networks

At the national level partners are making great efforts to establish their national networks; link up with relevant national-level projects, institutions and stakeholders; encourage national experts and practitioners to engage in the international network activities; provide for national contextualisation of the network's products (such as the self-assessment tool and the survey results); and offer activities for the national stakeholders (cf. Chapter 2.2) in form of workshops and online discussion forums in the national language, for example. The strategies of the partners vary and are adjusted to fit the national contexts, structures and possibilities. Where other trainer networks already exist, partners try to link up with them. In Austria, for example, there are some practice-oriented networks for IVET trainers in apprenticeship training that have been approached for cooperation. In Spain and Germany the existing TNet Network, which operates more at the policy level, provides an important forum for cooperation, dissemination and exchange. Those national level approaches towards dissemination and exploitation are fully described in the activities reports of the partners that are presented as supporting documents in the annexes to the confidential part of the report. Here we see that most partners seek to include a fixed dissemination component about the network into their regular work programme wherever possible. The Greek partner, for example, cooperates with a network of VET schools for which they organise several workshops per year. Now in each workshop the national and international Network to Support Trainers in Europe is presented and where possible results of the network activities are being reflected and discussed with the workshop participants. An exchange among the partners about effective strategies of network implementation and dissemination forms part of the evaluation component of the Network and will be the topic of a main session during the 3rd partner meeting (Madrid meeting in June 2009).

In addition to the various national-level dissemination strategies, the bottom-up and community building approach ensure the regular exchange with stakeholders and end users who are continuously encouraged to actively engage in the network activities and processes. Through their involvement it can be facilitated that the network activities are geared towards the needs of the different target groups and end users. For example, in the second half of the project period the assessment tool will be tested for implementation at the national level with VET practitioners so that final adjustments can take into consideration the actual needs of the end users. Also the survey findings are fed into a critical reflection process at the national level to support national contextualisation on the one hand, and refinement of European results on the other hand.

In the second half of the funding period partners will make enhanced efforts in order to promote the national Networks to reach sustainability and continuation at the national level in all participating countries.

2.9.3 Dissemination and exploitation through cooperation with related projects

Creating synergy effects through linkages and cooperation with related projects at the national and international level (cf. Chapter 2.4) is not only instrumental for disseminating the idea of a trainer community and validating the results of the network activities, but also for influencing and transforming education and training systems both at the national level as well as in a European perspective. One key aspect here is bringing research, policy and practice together and see how processes can be related and influenced at all the three levels. In addition, it helps to build up on

and learn from each other experiences. The close cooperation with other projects furthermore fosters European cooperation in the area of VET teachers and trainers, building the ground for ongoing international partnerships.

2.9.4 Dissemination and exploitation through participation in national and international events

As documented in the activities reports, the partners regularly attend national events, conferences and meetings to make the network known, but also to influence policy processes and establish cooperation with other projects at the national level. All partners are regularly provided with flyers, brochures and other material for dissemination purposes at those events. Some partners have also created information material in their own national language for distribution. The different events are to some degree fully documented and explained in the annexes. At the international level the Network was, for example represented at the conference on “*Teachers and trainers – at the heart of innovation and VET reforms*” that was held on 23th and 24th February in Thessaloniki and jointly organised by Cedefop and the European Commission. It will also be represented at

- the eLearning Baltics 2009 Conference on *Tools and Learning for Creativity and Innovation* in Rostock on 17-19 June 2009;
- the 16th gtw-Herbstkonferenz – *Technical Sciences and its Didactics – Work of Tomorrow in Technical Vocations: Research Approaches and Training Concepts for Vocational Training* to be held in Bremen on 5-6 October 2009;
- and the ESREA Research Network Inaugural Meeting on *Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professional Development* on 6-8 November 2009 in Thessaloniki, Greece.

In addition, the network was strongly promoted through the involvement of the network partners in a series of six regional consultation seminars that were conducted between October 2008 and January 2009 in the context of the project “VET Teachers and Trainers – Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe” (www.consultationseminars.org).

2.9.5 Dissemination and exploitation through the network’s products

Each network activity results in a product. Thus, as the network activities are being implemented several network products are being produced which are distributed (in hard copies) among the network partners, its members, conference participants and the broader VET community (see Chapter 3 for details). In addition, there is a continuous process of reiteration as those products, i.e. the results of the network activities presented in those documents, are reflected by the members at the national level, in particular critically assessing the transferability to the respective national context. All products are also made available for downloading at the Network’s platform. Through the newsletter, the members are being informed about new publications or discussion papers or discussion briefs, for example. In addition, hard copies of each product are made available to the partners for further distribution at the national level.

2.9.6 Dissemination and exploitation through databases and websites

Information about the network and its description has been fully entered into the ADAM database: Advanced Data Archive and Management system. It is further described on the partners' websites that includes a link to the network platform. The national agencies have also been informed about the network project. Whether other databases are also appropriate for further dissemination of the network (either at the national or international level) will be explored in 2009.

2.9.7 Dissemination and exploitation of the Network's methods and approach

As the network progresses we increasingly not just present the network, i.e. its idea and approach and the aim to getting involved more people and practitioners, but also engage in a process of reflecting about the methods the network applies and the cooperation process involved, particularly as concerns the e-learning experience and process of community building. For example, at the eLearning Baltics 2009 Conference on *Tools and Learning for Creativity and Innovation* the network coordinator will give a presentation on "E-conference and e-platform as tools for community building". This induces a process by which the network activities and its dissemination and exploitation introduce a new level of reflection about processes rather than content. This perspective will be further developed during the second half of the funding period where the evaluation component shall also be strengthened.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

3.1 Growing number of partners

During the reporting period the network has sub-contracted three more partners that now establish a national network in Turkey, Poland and the Czech Republic and fully engage in the network activities at the international level. Furthermore, an increasing number of other collaborating partners seek to get actively involved in the network activities and establish some kind of formal collaboration. This growing interest and engagement has a qualitative and quantitative impact on the network and contributes to the growing number of members that actively engage in the network activities.

3.2 List of products

3.2.1 VET trainer online platform integrating materials, tools and contacts

The network has developed and maintains a communication platform and portal which allows different permissions and provides functionality for i) messaging, ii) blogging, iii) shared collaborative work through a wiki, iv) news feeds and widgets to link aggregated content, v) user generated metadata and vi) static web pages. The target group are trainers, multipliers, experts, policy makers, institutions, academia, training centres, etc.

Network platform: <http://www.trainersineurope.org/>

3.2.2 Working paper on 1st joint network activity (survey)

The outcomes of the 1st joint network activity on data and trends that consisted of a survey with VET practitioners have been integrated into a working paper that has been made available electronically, but also as hard copies. The paper is presenting preliminary results since all partners wanted to continue to collect responses. The main reason for the continuation of the activity is that this exercise supports the network and the realisation of its objectives in several ways. First, it helps the partners to establish contacts to stakeholder institutions and VET practitioners in their country/country cluster which widens the outreach of the national networks. Second, it induces a process of reflection and discussion at the European level and supports those ongoing activities of the network which are geared towards policy consultation and programming, particularly as concerns the training of trainers. Third, it induces a process of reflection and policy debate at the national level that the partners would like to strengthen. As a result, the analysis will be deepened in a national perspective through partners engaging in a **process of national contextualisation** during the second half of the funding period. The network will continue the survey implementation and collecting responses until the summer of 2010 and conduct a new analysis. The new partners are partly joining in.

Kirpal, Simone & Wittig, Wolfgang (2009). *Training Practitioners in Europe: Perspectives on their work, qualification and continuing learning*. ITB Research Paper Series No 41/2009. Bremen: University of Bremen/Institute Technology and Education

<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:gbv:46-ep000106074> (for download)

The survey with the questionnaire in 18 different national languages can be accessed at <http://www.trainersineurope.org/activities/survey>

3.2.3 Self-assessment tool for VET practitioners

Lead by the Finnish partner, the network developed a self-assessment tool for trainers, which was adapted from a Finnish assessment tool for VET teachers. It has been adapted to the situation of in-company trainers and translated into English. The tool is available as paper version and online. While the tool is ready for implementation the partners decided to engage in a process of national implementation and validation, i.e. test the tool within their own national network and adapt it to national contexts where appropriate. This is already being done in Finland and extended to the Scandinavian cluster. For the other partners this will in most cases involve the translation of the tool into various languages. The tool will be further tested and piloted and refined in 2009 and 2010.

“Knowledge of in-company trainers. Self-assessment tool for VET practitioners”

<http://openetti.aokk.hamk.fi/seppoh/Osaamismittarit/english.htm>

3.2.4 Conference proceedings of the 1st international e-conferences on ‘the Training of Trainers’

A full report of the e-conference is provided in Chapter 7 of this part of the report. The e-conference that was held in November 2009 can be fully accessed and replayed at <http://www.trainersineurope.org/activities/conference/recordings/>. The exhibition can be accessed at <http://trainersineurope.pbworks.com/>

In addition, the network produced conference proceedings that feature the different conference contributions. The proceedings are available as hard copies or online for downloading:

“The Training of Trainers. First International Online Conference held on 5-6 November 2008”

organized by the Network to Support Trainers in Europe. Conference Proceedings

http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/itb_final_conference-proceedings.pdf

3.2.5 Project flyer

The project flyer gives a brief overview of the network, its objectives and partners. It is available in 8 national languages.

Network flyer in English http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2008/06/trainersineurope_flyer_eng_final.pdf

Network flyer in German

http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_deu_final.pdf

Network flyer in Dutch http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_ned.pdf

Network flyer in Finnish http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_fin.pdf

Network flyer in Estonian http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_est.pdf

Network flyer in Spanish http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_esp.pdf

Network flyer in French http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_fra.pdf

Network flyer in Greek http://www.trainersineurope.org/files/2009/05/trainersineurope_flyer_gre.pdf

4. Partnerships

4.1 Overview

The network benefits from a strong partnership and the high level of commitment the partners demonstrate towards the project. The partnership has been growing due to an increasing number of institutions or organisations which would like to be involved in the network, its activities and the community building process. While in the past additional partners have been included in the network through a formal process (such as sub-contracting) this will not be possible in the future for other interested parties. The growing numbers of partners have some implications for the management of the project, which are further explained in section 7 of the confidential part of the report.

Currently, four different kinds of partners constitute the partnership of the network. The **core partners** were involved in conceiving the network proposal and receive funding for developing national/regional networks and engage in all network activities that the network implements at the international level. The **associated partners** support the network in the same ways, but they do not receive any financial support. The collaboration with those partners emerged from former projects and they have been involved in the network since its inception. The **sub-contracted partners** receive limited funding to establish a national network and liaise at an international level with the other partners. They have been brought on board in order to facilitate the outreach of the network to other countries. During the 2nd partner meeting the partners agreed that all these partners should be fully recognised and included in all network communications and processes, including the partner meetings.

In addition to this established partnership an increasing number of interested institutions would like to establish a more formalised collaboration with the network. While involving ever more partners is a key objective of the network, two issues have emerged in this context. One is how to formalise the collaboration with interested parties. The second one addresses management aspects, i.e. to what degree it is possible and makes sense to fully involve those new **collaborating partners** in the network activities, processes and organisational aspects.

Apart from some exceptions, the partners involved in the network have collaborated in other related projects before. In fact, the network is a direct result of several European studies on trainers in VET which resulted in the strong wish and need from the side of the partners involved in those studies to intensify collaboration and coordination in the area of VET trainers. Thus, the partners of the network have had considerable experience in working together as a team so that the consortium can be characterised as an established partnership used to working together in the area the network addresses. This kind of partnership continuity certainly is a strong factor contributing towards the effectiveness and sustainability of the network.

4.2 National outreach of the partnership

Overall, the work of the network is structured along 5 key activities, two joint network activities, two online conferences and one final (face-to-face) conference. Each of those activities involves a series of tasks that, on the one hand, are the same for all partners (like developing, translating and implementing the questionnaire) so that they can exchange experiences and learn from

each others approach, and, on the other hand, involve specialised tasks (like the development of the assessment tool which was lead by the Finish partner) thereby taking advantage of partners' particular expertise in some areas. Similarly, when it comes to implementing the network at the national/regional level, all partners assume the same tasks and responsibilities within their respective country or country cluster. This approach of equal engagement has a positive effect on the partnership and commitment that the partners demonstrate to the network as well as on the working atmosphere and the exchange of experiences and mutual support.

So far through the partners' national level engagement, the network has been established in the following countries:

- In Austria and Hungary with increased collaboration with Liechtenstein. Outreach to Slovakia and Slovenia shall be explored during the second half of the funding period.
- In the Czech Republic, initially through involvement in the country cluster managed by the Austrian partner and later through establishing formal collaboration with a Czech institution by means of a sub-contract.
- In Greece, with enhanced collaboration with Cyprus and also to a lesser degree with Croatia.
- In Finland, with enhanced collaboration with Norway and Denmark and to a lesser degree also Sweden and Iceland. Denmark is interested in formalising the partnership collaboration with the Network.
- In the Netherlands with enhanced collaboration with the Flemish part of Belgium. Outreach to Luxembourg shall be strengthened during the second half of the funding period.
- In Estonia and some initial collaboration with Latvia and Lithuania. While all three countries form part of the Baltic cluster, language is a main barrier to establishing a network in the neighbouring countries. Formalising independent partnership with Lithuania is being explored.
- In Spain with some initial collaboration with Portugal.
- In Germany, the UK and Bulgaria.
- In Poland through establishing formal collaboration by means of a sub-contract.
- In Turkey through establishing formal collaboration by means of a sub-contract.

4.3 Quality of the partnership

All partners involved in the network are considered leading expert institutes in the field of vocational education and training and trainer's development at national and international level. While most partners are representing academia, some also represent public or private institutions responsible for education and training programmes or are independent training companies. A central objective of the consortium's approach consists of establishing good links and cooperation with other national stakeholders, experts, agencies and practitioners in the countries that the network covers, and identifying and consulting with those is a major methodological tool supporting the ongoing work programme of the network (see Chapter 2 for details).

The majority of partners cover country clusters, which have been grouped regionally (like, for example, the BENELUX, Baltic or Scandinavian countries) with the aim to provide access to and involve an increasing number of countries into the network process. Thus, the

consortium members are regarded as multipliers. All have an established collaboration with training centres and institutions directly responsible for the training and professional development of trainers such as chambers of commerce or the social partners. In fact, those institutions are also a main target group the network seeks to support. A considerable number of those stakeholders and practitioners had already been identified through their involvement in former studies so that right from the beginning of the network the partners could establish collaboration with a considerable number of institutions and experts in the field of VET.

While the network working language is English the national networks operate in their own national languages. Partners also seek to facilitate national forums of exchange in some of the national languages. Overall, all partners engage in all network activities collaboratively. A special function and role is only attributed to the UK partner who is responsible for the network platform and providing technical support for all e-learning features the network applies including the e-conferences. This partner is also responsible for evaluating and monitoring the e-features that the network implements create linkages with other online communities. However, also the UK partner engages in establishing a national/regional network.

The network coordinator provides management, coordination and team leadership. As one of the leading European research institutes in vocational education and training, the network coordinator has already managed a wide range of research and development projects on a regional, national and international level mostly run in cooperation with industry and other VET institutions. Overall, the coordinating institution has participated in over fifty pilot projects and in surveys and analysis projects funded by the European Union in programmes including ESPRIT, COMETT, FAST, FORCE, LEONARDO DA VINCI, SOCRATES, TSER and EU Framework Programmes. The institute has further played an active role in forming research networks at a European level, including Euronet Work and Education, EUROPROF (New Forms of Education of Professionals for Vocational Education and Training), FORUM (Forum for European Research and Vocational Education and Training) and WHOLE (Work Process Knowledge in Technological and Organizational Development).

5. Plans for the Future

5.1 2nd Joint Network Activity

The 2nd joint network activity focuses on policies and programming in the area of trainers. It is geared towards identifying innovation and good practice examples of programming and policies at the national level and discuss and model the transferability to other areas, sectors and national contexts as well as possible impact on a European dimension or framework, thereby taking into account current EU frameworks and initiatives in the area and making reference to the European Qualification Framework. A focus is thereby being placed on the continuing professional development of VET trainers.

This network activity started with initial preparations in 02/2009 and is planned to continue until 09/2009. The activity is implemented at different levels: at the national/regional level partners will identify and feature interesting examples and cases of innovation in the area of policies and programming. Complementary, the network is undertaking a series of online forum discussions, exploring implications and possibilities of transferability and broader impact of local initiatives. The first discussions focused on (European and national) qualification frameworks. A working session for the partners will be carried out during the partner meeting in Madrid in June 2009.

As concerns national examples of innovation and/or good practice, partners will develop case studies, also to strengthen the research component of the network activities. Rather than a working paper, partners currently consider a book publication as a result from this activity. Some case studies the partners will develop include:

Partner	Case/topic/programme
Greece	The national register for VET teachers and trainers
The Netherlands	Acknowledgement systems of training programmes of private institution – example of sectoral approach
Austria	'Ausbilderakademien' for the training and professional development of trainers in Austria
Germany	Concepts for the recognition of further training for trainers developed at the regional level: the new 'Berufspädagoge /IHK'
Poland	Certification of VET Professionals: A Competency-based approach and its implementation in the Polish system
Spain	The CIFO model (Occupational Training Collective Investigation) of Training of Trainers developed by the Department of Applied Pedagogy of the Autonomous University of Barcelona: Impact evaluation and transferability to the construction sector
Finland	Training of work place instructors with tools developed by the KOKEVA Osaaja network project

5.2 2nd E-conference

The 2nd e-conference is planned to be organised on 28-29 October 2009. The topic will be centred around innovations and creativity in training practice. A key objective for the 2nd e-conference is to attract an increasing number of participants since the first e-conference was so popular and had a great impact on the community building process.

5.3 Organisation of Final Conference

The network will organise a (face-to-face) Global Conference on VET trainers in month 35. The rationale for the Global conference is visibility and political impact. The final conference will provide an opportunity to present the network's activities and products and discuss policy implications with academia, policy makers and practitioners. Emphasis will be given on trainers' changing role in lifelong learning, good practice examples and the European dimension of the situation, work and qualification of VET trainers.

5.4 Strengthening the development of the national networks

During the second half of the project period intensified efforts will be undertaken to support the development and promotion of the national networks. This is a key objective because sustainability of the network will in the place be achieved through securing national-level support on a continuing basis. Thereby, a strong focus will be placed on expanding the network and making it more attractive in particular for training practitioners. Most partners also planning some national/regional meetings to strengthen the collaboration with national stakeholders, but also to get an idea about what those actually expect from the network. During the second half the implementation of the national networks will also be assessed and evaluated. Another key component that will strengthen the national network is the development of national sites (see below).

5.5 Development of national sites

The creation of national sites shall help develop the network at the national level and facilitate communication and exchange in the national languages. The sites will be very simple and preferably an 'add on' to an already existing site. This approach will ensure ownership and sustainability because it will make the national sites independent from the Network of Trainers platform and European project funding. The national sites should have the following features:

- Linkages to relevant national websites that could be of interest to VET practitioners;
- Linkages to international relevant websites and platforms (such as Network platform) that could be of interest to VET practitioners;
- Information about relevant national and international activities and initiatives that could be of interest for trainers;
- Linkages to some practical tools;

- Communication forum – to facilitate communication and exchange for a language community among practitioners;
- A register to establish a database and mailing list to inform practitioners about up-coming events and news.

5.6 Strengthening the use of the platform

Although platforms and e-tools nowadays are in widespread use for Technology Enhanced Learning (and Wordpress is the world's leading blogging platform), for many network members (including the partners) the use of such web-based tools is new and they require considerable support. Some members of the site are proficient and experienced in the use of the platform and tools, others have little previous experience. Thus, a variety of means of support have been provided, particularly through one-to-one coaching using the skype text and VOIP platform.

One of the key ideas behind the platform is to move members beyond seeing it as just a website for passively consuming resources to an active community in which they participate. We are aware that this shift will take time, particularly for the community of researchers and VET practitioners with whom we are working. However activity layers suggest that such a shift is slowly happening. We are also encouraged by the evaluation of the online conference, which despite most participants having not taken part in such an activity before, was overwhelmingly positive.

Still there remain usability issue which the network will continue to strive to improve, particularly as concerns the interfaces and overall usability of the platform and tools. It should also be noted that the network is using advanced social software tools. Development costs for such tools is high and we have striven to develop partnerships with other organisations and agencies – in the case of Jisc and the Open University – to be able to access such tools. In other cases we have opted to use free services offered by third party providers – such as PB wiki, Facebook and Google. We are aware of the dangers of data loss through these services and wherever possible are backing up content to our own servers.

In terms of encouraging more visitors to the site, we suspect these will increase as more materials become available. We are also encouraged by the success of the Facebook group and will continue to explore how we can use social software and networking applications to promote the platform. We suspect that twitter may be extremely useful in this regard. We also have ideas for adding more networking functionality to the platform. However, we are aware that some users are still learning how to use the existing functions and are slowly adding new features to allow users to get used to what they can do with the platform and tools. Some future planned technical developments for the platform will include:

- Improvements to the interface and usability;
- Increased integration of third party services and tools through embedded applications and widgets;
- Further development of multi-media content and services;
- Continued moderation of the site content
- Continued support to platform users.
- Continued promotion of the platform through appropriate channels, particularly seeking to use the second e-conference to attract more users.

5.7 Exploring approaches towards the sustainability of the network

Now that the setting-up of the network at the national and international level has been successful, partners are being concerned about how the network can be continued after the funding period. From the side of project management, four independent but linked routes should be explored to secure a sustainable framework that can facilitate the continuation of the partnership and network activities. This includes the following considerations:

- The national networks including national sites should be fully developed by the end of the funding period. We believe that it may be possible to establish sustainable structures at the national level for a considerable number of participating countries.
- Possibilities are being explored to find an institution or company, which may be interested in continuing the maintenance and further development of the platform as a forum for mutual exchange and community building.
- The partners are interested to continue the partnership by means of engaging in follow-up European projects. These, however, should preferably have a stronger research component and focus. Since it is unlikely that a joint project could accommodate all partners currently involved in the network, sub-consortia are starting to develop ideas for new joint research and development projects in the area of trainers.
- We think it will be possible to get funding for particular events, such as organising another online conference or other e-learning events. This route will be explored after 2010.

6. Contribution to EU policies and added value

Added value can in particular be realised in relation to the following aspects:

- Trainers in initial and continuing vocational education and training are a fairly heterogeneous target group across Europe, which is typically neither represented through any kinds of professional association nor is it considered to be a status or professional group in most European countries. The network seeks to induce a community building process among this target group both at the national and European level. Enhancing the status and professional development of this target group is a key aim of European policies as VET teachers and trainers are considered key actors in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies.
- Many European countries have induced reforms as concerns their education and training systems in which trainers play a key role. Often this is linked to establishing some basic standards for trainers' professional development and support commendable training practice. In order to support those reform processes many countries seek to exchange experiences and information with other national initiatives across Europe. The platform provides a forum and a structure that facilitates such kind of knowledge sharing and exchange, thereby supporting countries to enhance the quality of training provisions. The platform also facilitates linking people and establishing contact for partnership building and collaboration.
- Overall, hardly any data and material are available on the target group. Thus, the network activities imply a component that is geared towards getting insight into the work, situation, qualification and continuing learning of trainers (data collection in the framework of the 1st joint network activity which is now being continued until 2010; case studies in the framework of the 2nd joint network activity). Furthermore, all partners engage in selecting and collecting information, materials, resources, tools, etc. as an ongoing basis throughout the three years of the network project. Through the platform new material is being made available to a wide audience. The information provided is also useful for policy makers and managers responsible for training practice and the training of trainers and can inform European policy, particularly as concerns the results from the 2nd joint network activities related to 'innovations in policies and programming'.
- The 2nd network activity focuses on innovative programmes and policies in the area of VET trainers. Programming and the continuing professional development of trainers is the thematic focus with the aim of developing some kind of roadmap for the improvement of the work situation and qualification of trainers. The activity will identify good practice examples of programming and policies and discuss and model the transferability to other areas, sectors and national contexts as well as possible models for a European dimension or framework thereby taking into account current EU frameworks and initiatives in the area and making reference to the European Qualification Framework. The thematic focus will closely connect to broader lifelong learning policies and actions to see how those aims at the level of the role of trainers can best be met.
- At both the national and international level the network seeks to link policies, practice and research in order to offer valuable information for all kinds of stakeholders and training practitioners. With this approach we seek to link the different initiatives and approaches at

the European level, but also by taking account of single national-level initiatives. This combined approach linked with e-learning component makes the network to be different any other network that has so far been established for this target group.

- The e-learning component is a special feature of the network and consequently applied to a target group that is so far fairly unfamiliar with those tools. The e-conferences and the technical support that the network offers to the users – both to the network members and its partners, but also the broader VET community – is unique in this area.
- The network places some emphasis on reviewing and developing tools and innovative concepts that are applied in training practice and the training of trainers. Some of those tools involve instruments to assess and identify competence needs of trainers. This is a key priority area of European policy.
- The mutual exchange that the network promotes effectively links a 'bottom-up approach' with international and European perspectives on trainers in VET. It is, on the one hand, designed to address and support trainers, practitioners and multipliers at regional, sectoral and company level, who through the mediating function of the network consortium partners are being actively involved in this process. Their involvement and shared experience that reflect the practical work and situation of trainers is seen as a valuable contribution to processes and programming initiatives at the European level. In addition, national educational programmes affecting VET trainers are being linked and better coordinated with initiatives at the European level.

7. Report and Evaluation of E-Conference

by Graham Attwell & Cristina Costa (Pontydysgu)

7.1 Introduction

The Network to Support Trainers in Europe held its first annual online conference on “the Training of Trainers” on 5 and 6 November, 2008. The conference was led by the network partner Pontydysgu, UK who was responsible for the conference work package and organization. The event was co-sponsored by the Jisc funded Evolve network.

The target group of the conference were all those interested in the training and professional development of training practitioners such trainers, tutors, mentors, instructors, teachers and other individuals that assume training functions in various contexts. This included practitioners on the one hand, but also researchers, managers, policy makers and other interested stakeholders and individuals.

The conference was widely promoted through the network website, network partners and various online networks. It took place through the internet using the Elluminate conference platform and various other internet spaces. Further details of the technology are provided under section 4 of this report.

7.2 Participants

140 participants registered in advance for the conference. However, in common with other free online conferences, attendance was less. Attendance at different sessions varied from around 50 at maximum to 30 at minimum. Overall, around 75 people participated in the conference from about 20 countries.

7.3 Conference Themes

The following section provides an introduction to the themes of the conference.

Topic 1: The changing role of trainers in learning

With the growing importance of initial and continuing learning in enterprises and the rapid introduction of new technologies, the role of trainers is changing. Research suggests that ever growing numbers of people are assuming responsibilities for training as part of their work to various degrees. At the same time a move towards more authentic work-based learning can be observed in many European countries and also in VET systems that used to be predominantly school-based. This stronger practice orientation is impacting on the role and activities of trainers. A series of studies have talked of a move away from didactic classroom and workshop-based training towards facilitating enquiry-based learning. In addition, the widespread introduction of e-learning also poses new challenges for trainers. Issues that were explored in this session included:

- Exploration of the target group: Who are the trainers?
- New challenges for the target group: What are the (new) roles of trainers? What are the implications of changing roles for trainers?

- Continuing learning and professional development: What are the implications for the professional development of trainers?

Topic 2: Support for the professional development of trainers

With an increasing recognition of the importance of trainers and training in general, the initial and continuing professional development of trainers is also coming under scrutiny. Research suggests that structures and processes for training trainers are fragmentary and differ widely in different countries, regions and sectors. In most countries mandatory standards or qualifications for trainers do not exist. It may well be that most trainers rely on personal networks and informal learning for their professional development. Issues that were explored in this session included:

- What are the competency and qualification structures and programmes of the training of trainers in different countries?
- Are there any opportunities for the continuing professional development of trainers?
- What role does informal learning and self-directed learning for trainers' professional development play?
- How can communities of practice facilitate and support trainers' professional development?

Topic 3: Work-based learning

Studies and reports indicate a move away from classroom and work-based training towards work-based learning. Such learning is seen as being based on practice and thus developing applied work practice knowledge. Work-based learning may also be more authentic and situated than classroom-based training and may be more cost-effective in contributing to production processes. Issues that were explored in this session included:

- How can the work environment be organised so that it supports work-based learning?
- Which are important pedagogic approaches to work-based learning?
- How can work process knowledge and work-based learning best be linked?

Topic 4: E-learning for trainers

E-Learning is increasingly impacting on training. Larger enterprises are developing in-house e-learning programmes for their employees. The internet is increasingly being used for informal learning. Internet-based tools offer opportunities for accessing learning in the workplace and for communication. E-portfolios can be used to record and reflect on learning. Web 2.0 tools offer opportunities to develop customised multi-media materials to support training. Issues that were explored in this session included:

- What is the impact of e-learning on training and trainers' work?
- How can we best use e-learning to support trainers?
- How can we encourage and recognise informal internet-based learning?
- What is the potential of e-Portfolios for training?

7.4 Platforms and Technology

The schedule and advance information for the conference were provided through the Network for Trainers in Europe website. The conference took place in the Elluminate platform provided by

the conference sponsor Evolve. Elluminate is an easy to use and technically powerful environment that allows the exchange and development of ideas through audio, chat and a shared whiteboard. The platform works on all major operating systems – including Windows, Apple and Linux.

The network partners moderated the conference sessions while speakers and contributors mainly came from the broader VET community. A call for papers was released 4 months prior to the conference and disseminated through the network partners and platform. Moderators and speakers were offered training on how to use the platform in advance of the conference. As a trial for the network partners an online meeting was organised one month prior to the conference using the Elluminate software. Participants were provided with access to help files and there was a short session at the start of each conference day providing a tour of platform features. Technical help was further provided by the work package leader, Pontydysgu, to those partners who experienced problems in accessing the platform. In addition, Pontydysgu set up a ‘sand box’ for trying out the platform in advance of the conference. The sessions were organised according to 15 minutes input and 15 minutes discussion.

7.5 Conference schedule, speakers and abstracts

Day 1 - 5 November 2008		
Morning session: The changing role of trainers in learning		
10.00 - 10.30	Introduction to Conference	<i>Simone Kirpal Graham Attwell Cristina Costa</i>
10.30 - 11.00	<u>Introduction to theme:</u> “Employees supporting the learning, training and development of others while working in groups: examples drawn from aerospace, health and accountancy” Some organisations formally support arrangements whereby employees learn from each other while working in groups, with explicitly encouraging some team members to support the learning and development of others. The accountancy case study draws on the Early Career Learning project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP).	<i>Alan Brown, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, UK Associate Director of TLRP with responsibility for workplace learning</i>
11.30 – 12.00	“Education, training and employment” The training and skills agenda in the UK and the challenges of using education as a means (largely inappropriately) of addressing persistent unemployment.	<i>George Roberts Oxford Brookes University</i>
11.30 – 12.00	“Lifelong learning and the role of trainers” Lifelong Learning (LLL) has become synonymous with gaining more qualifications throughout one’s life. The role of the trainer is to ensure that these qualifications are acquired – and produced. This carries the notion of mass qualification and represents an inward, overly academic and ‘paper-qualification’ perspective on LLL. However, the challenge for the modern trainer is to train people to continuously learn to be innovative (in an action-LLL context) in their social and work contexts.	<i>Barry Nyhan Ireland</i>

Afternoon session: Support for the professional development of trainers		
14.30 - 15.00	<p><u>Introduction to theme:</u> “Innovations in trainers’ training: Documenting and analyzing work processes with digital media and photos” Demonstration of the changing role of the vocational teacher in enhancing the learning of workplace tutors. Work processes are documented with digital photos for later analysis and joint reflection with groups of learners.</p>	<p><i>Seija Mahlamäki-Kultanen & Anita Eskola-Kronqvist, HAMK, Finland</i></p>
15.00 - 15.30	<p>“Developing the competences of trainers in Portugal” Based on a qualitative empirical investigation the TTPlus project developed a framework for the continuing professional development of trainers. The contribution presents the findings for trainers in Portugal.</p>	<p><i>Eduardo Figueira Portugal</i></p>
15.30 - 16.00	<p>“Training practitioners in Europe. Perspectives on their work, qualification and continuing learning” Results are being presented from a European survey with over 700 trainers that was implemented by the Network to Support Trainers in Europe in 2008.</p>	<p><i>Simone Kirpal ITB, University of Bremen, Germany</i></p>
16.00 - 16.30	<p>“A framework for the continuing professional development of trainers – Implications for trainers and stakeholders at a national and European level”</p>	<p><i>Eileen Lübcke ITB, University of Bremen, Germany</i></p>
16.30 - 16.45	<p>Summary of Day 1</p>	<p><i>Graham Attwell Pontydysgu, UK</i></p>
Day 2 – 6 November 2008		
Morning & afternoon session: Work-based learning and E-learning for trainers		
10.30 - 11.00	<p><u>Introduction to theme:</u> “Using social software tools for supporting the online training of trainers”</p>	<p><i>Cristina Costa Pontydysgu, UK</i></p>
11.00 - 11.30	<p>“E-learning for health care assistants in Germany. A case study from practice” Some training projects in Germany assess the training needs and potentials for e-learning with trainers (e.g. www.fachprax.de). The restructuring of the health sector leads to growing demands of IT proficiency, quality management and communication skills. The training offer for health care assistants is poor and there are several barriers for the participation in training. For medicine, by contrast, there are high-quality e-learning opportunities. But trainers need themselves experience with e-learning as learners. This requires a rethinking of didactical approaches.</p>	<p><i>Doris Beer Germany</i></p>
12.00 - 12.30	<p>“The ePortfolio process – supporting the trainer and training” The presentation describes the ePortfolio process and explores its relationship with learning, relating the process to different training situations and exploring the potential of the ePortfolio process to support training and the trainer.</p>	<p><i>John Pallister, UK</i></p>
12.30 - 13.00	<p>“The professional development of teachers in groups,</p>	<p><i>Vance Stevens</i></p>

	<p>communities and networks”</p> <p>At the second WiAOC conference (2007), Etienne Wenger gave a keynote and was asked whether his ideas on CoPs had changed as a result of his interaction with Webheads. Surprisingly, he said that they had, especially regarding the nature of space occupied by the community. He said that we know who we are in terms of domain and practice but we have freed ourselves from constraints on space in spanning so many available spaces in distributing ourselves. We clearly are a CoP, but with very loosely defined boundaries. At the same online conference, Stephen Downes (2007) made a distinction between groups, communities, and networks: A YahooGroup characterizes that first level of interaction, whereby a group forms to disseminate information, but might not necessarily be a community. A community implies greater interaction where members</p>	<p><i>Abu Dubai</i></p>
14.30 - 15.00	<p>“Professional Development in Online Circles of Learning”</p> <p>New and emergent technologies enable trainers to pursue professional development away from their institutional setting. Some possibilities of informal learning through the participation in Communities of Practice and online sessions and spaces and how those impact positively on the way how trainers learn and enhance their professional development are being presented.</p>	<p><i>Carla Arena & Mary Hillis United States, Brazil, Japan</i></p>
15.00 - 15.30	<p>“VITAE – introducing 21st century skills through mentoring”</p> <p>Is it a good idea to include mentor training in Web 2.0 pedagogy course? The VITAE project is piloting this approach to encourage VET practitioners to use these tools on their own. Preliminary project results are being presented.</p>	<p><i>Anne Fox Denmark</i></p>
15.30 - 16.00	<p>“TrainerGuide – made in Denmark”</p> <p>The Multidisciplinary University College of Copenhagen is developing an international TrainerGuide, a digital handbook for trainers. Inspired by German practise and developed and implemented in Denmark it will be further developed and transferred to 5 countries: Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany and Turkey. The TrainerGuide’s main target groups are in-company trainers (at the level of skilled workers) and companies’ training planners.</p>	<p><i>Regina Lamscheck Nielsen DEL, Denmark</i></p>
16.00 - 16.30	<p>“Online Collaboration to teach and learn with each other – analysing the benefits and advantages”</p> <p>While “learning together” has probably turned into one of the most fashionable phrases in educational literature in recent years, the true possibilities for online collaboration are still frequently overlooked by both trainers and students in spite of the recent web (2.0) explosion. Information has never been easier to access. But the real power of the web is not the mere access to data, but the opportunity to transform such information into new</p>	<p><i>Linda Castañeda GITE Educational Technology Research Group, University of Murcia, Spain</i></p>

	knowledge, and the chance to do it in a collaborative way. The web is particularly relevant to empower joint learning. However, collaboration is still visible in course curricula, and learners and trainers often do not regard collaboration as an effective way of learning.	
16.30 - 16.45	Summary of Day 2 and conference conclusions	<i>Graham Attwell Pontydysgu, UK</i>

7.6 Exhibition

The conference was accompanied by a Training the Trainers online conference exhibition. The exhibition opened two weeks prior to the conference and was designed to showcase developments and practice in the training of trainers.

Exhibits were welcomed in any digital form. This included:

- Videos
- Audio
- Photographs
- Handbooks
- Leaflets and flyers
- Papers and reports
- Websites

The overall themes for the exhibition were the same as for the conference itself: The changing role of trainers in learning; support for the professional development of trainers; and work-based and e-learning for trainers. However, for the exhibition exhibits that focused on examples of practice in the training and professional development of trainers were particularly encouraged. The following exhibits were submitted for the exhibition which took place on a wiki site linked to the main network website.

The changing role of trainers

- From teacher-centred to learner-focused – Letting Learners Create by Cristina Costa (English)
- IT-Based Knowledge Management: New Perspectives for Teachers and Trainers by Herold Gross (English)
- Changing the training role, to change the training system by Paco Cerezo (English/Spanish)

Support for the professional development of trainers

- Learning through Online Community of Practices by Cristina Costa
- An overview of VET according to the Austrian experience (focusing on several key-issues) by Silvia Weiss

Work based leaning

- Learning in the workplace by Olesja Bokova (English/Estonian)
- Control Risk Management – pedagogical patterns by Markku Kuivalahti (English)

E-learning for trainers

- Language teachers learning online and in community by Cristina Costa (English)
- Online Collaboration to Teach and Learn With Each Other by Linda Castañeda (English)
- Prozessorientiert ausbilden by Herold Gross (German)
- Beitrag Ausbilderhandbuch by Herold Gross (German)
- Modern Training Approaches by Herold Gross (English)
- Forum für AusbilderInnen [external Link] by Herold Gross (German) [see poster]
- Good Practices – 1st experiences in training online - by fase.net (English)
- Professional Development in Online Circles of Learning by Carla Arena and Mary Hillis (English)

7.7 Conference proceedings

The conference proceedings were made available online in a number of different formats for each conference session:

- as playable Elluminate recordings (including all video and audio plus chat)
- as MP3 files (audio only)
- as Powerpoint slides of presentations
- as a booklet/print publication featuring a selection of presentations and discussions

The full conference can be accessed and replayed at

<http://www.trainersineurope.org/activities/conference/recordings/>

The exhibition can be accessed at <http://trainersineurope.pbworks.com/>

7.8 Evaluation

An evaluation of the conference was undertaken applying a standardised questionnaire and using the online Survey Monkey tool (www.surveymonkey.com). Following the conference participants were invited to answer an online survey about their experience and perceptions regarding the event. 31 people fully or partially answered the questionnaire.

The survey was composed of 13 questions and divided into two sections. The first section included 9 closed questions aimed at gathering information about the conference audience, participants' proficiency with computers, their prior experience with this kind of approach and their general opinion about the event. The remaining 4 questions were open questions aimed at collecting respondents' views about the event in terms of levels of satisfaction, the importance they attributed to such experience, and their suggestions on how to improve it in the future.

The evaluation reveals that the conference brought together a **balanced mix of participants** from training, education and research. About 50 per cent of the respondents were teachers and trainers, whereas the remaining respondents were researchers. Overall, participants regarded the event as beneficial and interesting. Despite the fact that for 51.6 per cent of the participants (16 out of 31 respondents) this was the first time they attended an online conference, no negative reviews were given and only some suggestions for technical improvements were provided under the open questions (see further below). About 20 per cent rated themselves as very experienced computer users, while the majority (54.8%) considered

they were good with computers. The remaining 25.8 per cent rated their computer skills as average.

26.7 per cent of all respondents stated that the conference had completely met their expectations, 46.7 per cent that it had largely met their expectation and 23.3 per cent that it had partly met their expectations. Only one person said it had not met their expectations. Bearing in mind that for more than half of the respondents this was the first time they took part in such an event this is very positive feedback, particularly as such events present changing patterns of presenting, attending and actively engaging with the audience.

The **quality of the information** distributed before and during the conference was also positively rated by the majority. 56.6 per cent of the respondents declared the information had been 'comprehensive and clear', while 31 per cent stated it was 'good'. However, despite this positive feedback there may be still room for improvement regarding the way information is provided to the participants prior to and during the event.

Regarding the **quality of the presentations** more than a quarter of the participants stated that the presentations were 'extremely good', while 60 per cent rated them as 'fairly good'. Only one participant considered the presentations 'below average'. Similar results were obtained for the discussions, which 30 per cent of attendees considered to have been 'extremely good' and 50 per cent 'fairly good'. Five people (16.7 per cent) rated the discussions as 'average'.

Questions 8 focused on the **use of technology as an enabler or barrier** to active participation in the conference. Here, almost half of the respondents confirmed that the 'technology allowed full participation' while another 23.3 per cent stated that technology enhanced communication. Only two participants considered the technology to be a barrier. Overall, 90 per cent of the respondents stated that they would attend another online conference or similar event if they were given the opportunity.

This feed-back leads us to conclude that despite the fact that for more than half of the respondents this was their first experience as a participant in an online conference, and thus also the first time they used such interactive tools, the event was seen as positive and engaging. Despite the fact that a few people encountered problems with the technology, which happened to be mainly due to institutional firewalls and problems of microphone setups, they reckoned that the event added value to their learning and professional networking activities. For those less experienced with the online environment the conference was also a good learning experience in the sense of being exposed to the technology involved and actively engaging with it (in this case web 2.0 technologies).

Looking at the open questions, it was the sharing of knowledge and experiences that participants appreciated most of the event. They further highly valued the interactive and participatory environment developed during the event – both aided by the technology and enhanced by the moderators. The flexibility and easy accessibility to the event (avoiding travelling and enabling people to connect only to the sessions of interest) were other positive aspects the participants frequently mentioned. Some participants also appreciated the free access to international experts in the field of training and the possibility to connect to people from different countries. The intercultural environment of the event and the diversity of ideas shared within the selected topics were also pertinent to the audience. Furthermore, the conference facilitated community building processes. Particularly positive was the technical support the conference organisers provided to the individual delegates. Finally, some delegates

were also impressed with some of the presentations and with the interactive dynamic that was established among the speakers.

From the open sections of the questionnaire we can conclude that the conference was a successful experience for the vast majority of the participants. Conference attendees derived the main benefits from the possibilities of networking and sharing practice and ideas with an international group of speakers and an intercultural audience facilitated through a flexible platform that allowed them to join the sessions at their convenience and according to their personal and professional interests. The technical support provided and the moderation structure enabled them to fully participate in the event.

As concerns the **conference topics** most feed-back evolved around the presentations and discussions on the changing roles of trainers. This is in so far interesting as the greatest feed-back to the call for papers was related to contributions on e-learning, which finally lead to the restructuring of the conference programme in order to fully accommodate this topic. It may well be that the online setting of the conference attracted more presenters who are experts in the field of e-learning. In addition, e-learning is assumed to impact strongly on trainers' practice and competence requirements. Other opinions that came across strongly were related to learning through shared practice and knowledge and the potentials of new technologies to enhance the quality of training and international communication among practitioners. Another aspect that was pointed out was the community building process that the conference supported: communication among peers; the development of new opportunities for collaboration; connecting to people who share similar ideas and experiences; and getting familiar with the network and its interactive platform.

In terms of **what could be improved for future online events** most comments related to technical issues. Participants suggested that web-cameras should be used in all of the sessions and that the sound quality should be improved. Some participants felt distracted by the parallel chat that was taking place in the (written) chatroom while speakers were presenting. Few participants also recommended that the event should be shorter and that maybe some session could take place after working hours. While these suggestions are useful, it is important to note that all of them are closely linked with participants' technical expertise and confidence with the environment more than it has to do with the organization of the event or web 2.0 technologies.

The final open question again revealed the predominant positive evaluation of the conference from the side of the participants, who described the event as inspiring, encouraging and a starting point for further discussions and exchange. Some used the opportunity of obtaining a certificate of attendance as evidence of their participation in the conference as a learning activity. Overall, the conference uniquely provided a two-day free learning event on and for trainers, delivered online to an international audience, which was encouraged to flexibly use and experience web 2.0 technologies in an interactive way.

8. Reflections

While from the perspective and approach of engagement from the side of the partners the network is considered a 'project' it is insofar different from general research and development projects as all network activities are not geared towards a 'final product' (such as a research report), but towards an ongoing process that should reach sustainability after the funding period ends. This process orientation also attributes a new perspective or dimension to the network products that are being realised in the course of the different network activities. Those products are fed into an ongoing process of reflection and validation, supporting subsequent network activities that are implemented both at the national and international level. This explains why the network partners converted the 'products' of the 1st network activity into a tool that is being refined and further adjusted until the network period officially ends. Since particularly the survey results are being fed into a process of policy consultation at different levels the decision of the partners to leave the survey open until 2010 and collect more responses in order to get a more validated insight into the work and learning of trainers, which should further be evaluated by means of national contextualisation, makes sense. This is one example that shows that the processes inherent of building a network follow a different logic than regular research and development projects. This issue needs to be further addressed and monitored, also by the European Commission. One objective of the network is to more strongly evaluate the impact of the process orientation of network implementation in terms of what it means for the structure and effectiveness of the network at different levels.

