



QF2TEACH – Qualified to TEACH

Progress Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents aims, approaches and interim outcomes of the QF2TEACH project. The report addresses adult education exerts and stakeholder, namely practitioners, researchers and policy makers in the field of adult education and lifelong learning.

QF2TEACH deals with competences and qualifications of learning facilitators working with adults – this means adult education course teachers, trainers in companies and in general all people, whose professional activity takes place in direct contact with adult learner(s) and consists in initiating, supporting and monitoring learning processes of adults.

In the end, QF2TEACH will develop a research-based transnational qualification framework for this professional group. It will be linked to the existing overarching European Qualification Framework and will help to make the existing qualification levels of adult learning facilitators visible and comparable throughout Europe. It will also help to make increase the visibility and profile of this professional group as such.

The project consortium covers eight European countries and consists of university departments and non-university research and development institutes who are all specialised in adult education. Project coordinator is the German Institute for Adult Education - Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning (DIE).

The first part of QF2TEACH consists in an extensive research activity to determine what core competencies adult learning facilitators need to possess. Starting point is a literature review and an analysis of existing competence profile descriptions in the partner countries. On this basis an expert-panel research is designed and conducted. The applied methodology (Delphi survey in two waves) is particular as it is aimed at building consensus among the surveyed experts. The survey will thus result in a catalogue of core competencies whose outstanding importance has been commonly acknowledged by the involved experts. In the second part of the project the catalogue of core competencies will be translated into a transnational qualification framework for adult learning facilitators. In addition each partner country will also produce a national qualification framework for this group. These national frameworks may be more detailed and specific as they may reflect national peculiarities of the sector. The qualification frameworks will be presented and discussed in expert workshops before the final version will be completed and disseminated in the final phase of the project.

At this moment the first wave of the Delphi survey has been completed and analyzed. The results suggest a first version of the catalogue of core competencies for Adult Learning Facilitators. This version will be tested and validated in the second wave which is currently being prepared and is due to be completed by the end of 2010. The development of the qualification frameworks will take place in the first half of 2011. Stakeholders and potential users of the qualification frameworks will be involved in this process so that their interest in the project results and a sense of ownership is raised at an early point. Possible usages of the qualification frameworks include for example:

- the documentation and validation of competencies that have been acquired by adult learning facilitators at work or in informal contexts;
- the design of training programmes, including higher education curricula, for adult educators,
- the determination of minimum professional standards for specific job positions in the adult learning sector.

Besides involving representatives of potential users in the development process as mentioned, the project partners will disseminate the results widely to an expert public mainly through publications and presentations, so as to increase the level of awareness and ensure sustainability of the project outcomes.

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1. Project Objectives

The qualifications of Learning Facilitators in Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) are considered to be of vital importance for the future-development of competing societies. The term ACE Learning Facilitators refers to a variety of professional roles such as teachers, trainers, coaches, guidance and counseling staff and others. What these roles have in common is that a major part of the professional activity takes place in direct contact with the adult learner(s) and consists in initiating, supporting and monitoring the learning processes of these adults. The activities of Learning Facilitators can be considered as classical aspects of the work of most ACE professionals working in different domains of ACE, such as vocational education, corporate and functional education, social and moral education or cultural and arts education. In the last decades it has been considered that Learning Facilitators have an increasing need to improve their existing skills and competencies and to extend their skills- and competence-profile with new and enhanced skills and competencies (e.g. counseling skill, intercultural skills etc.).

The QF2TEACH project started to determine the core competencies needed by Adult Learning Facilitators in Europe. The project addresses the core competencies which are relevant today and in the near future by conducting an expert-panel research design (Delphi study). On the basis of the results – i.e. on the basis of what, according to the Learning Facilitators should be able to know and to do – the project consortium will develop different national sectoral Qualification Frameworks and a transnational Qualification Framework for Learning Facilitators in ACE linked to the European Qualifications Framework. Possible usages of the qualification frameworks include for example:

- the documentation and validation of competencies that have been acquired by Adult Learning Facilitators at work or in informal contexts
- the design of training programmes, including higher education curricula, for adult educators,
- the determination of minimum professional standards for specific job positions in the adult learning sector.

With the help of these qualification frameworks the QF2TEACH project pursues the following aims:

- The project will enhance the development of training schemes and thus of the competence level for Adult Learning Facilitators. It thus vitally contributes to raising the quality of lifelong learning provision, because Learning Facilitators play a key role in imparting knowledge and skills and in promoting the personal development of adults.
- The project addresses the need for the realization of an European area for lifelong learning through facilitating job mobility of Adult Learning Facilitators – both freelancers and employees - within Europe.
- Through defining a transnational qualification framework for Adult Learning Facilitators which may be used for reference in the partner countries (and beyond) the project will enhance the transparency of the adult learning sector both at national and transnational level. Existing qualifications and competence profiles may be assessed against this reference standard, and this, in turn, will facilitate quality assurance and development in the sector.
- By introducing a standardized and empirically derived qualifications framework for Adult Learning Facilitators, the profile, visibility and attractiveness of the Adult Learning sector will be enhanced.

2. Project Approach

In the first step, the QF2TEACH project determines through research activities what are the core competences needed by Adult Learning Facilitators in Europe. On the basis of the research results, concepts for a transnational as well as for national qualification frameworks for Adult Learning facilitators are developed.

The core competencies are researched and determined using the methodology of Delphi study. A Delphi study is an expert panel research which is aimed at gradually building consensus among the surveyed experts on a given issue, in this case: the core competencies. Experts in our case are mainly Adult Learning Facilitators themselves – who are in the best position to know what competencies are actually required in their work. But to ensure a broader range of perspectives the expert group includes also other types of experts, such as training managers, researchers or policy makers. The Experts are asked in two waves using a questionnaire. The questionnaire for the first wave is constructed on the basis of a former European project on competencies in ACE (Q-Act project - Qualifying the Actors in Adult and Continuing Education) and on the basis of an extensive literature review in the partner countries. The questionnaire of the second wave is redesigned on the basis of the outcomes of the first waves and with a view to enabling consensus among the experts on a set of core competencies in the end. For this purpose, the questionnaire in the second wave includes all items that have proven to be significant for the experts during the first wave. At the same time, the items are grouped in a different way in the second wave, according to what the analysis of the first wave data (a factor analysis has been applied) suggests.

After the second wave of the Delphi the second part of the project is dedicated to the development of a transnational Qualification framework and national sectoral Qualification Frameworks linked to the eight levels of the EQF. Draft qualification frameworks are prepared by the partner consortium on the basis of the research outcomes. These drafts are presented and discussed with experts at a series of workshops. The final versions of the qualification frameworks are completed after the workshops taking into consideration the outcomes of the workshops.

For the construction of the national sectoral Qualification Frameworks, in each partner country one national expert workshop is conducted. Furthermore an international Workshop is conducted in order to construct the transnational Qualification framework.

The quality and the sustainability of the project outcomes is ensured through the project evaluation and through the dissemination/ exploitation strategy. The evaluation is conducted both as an internal and an external formative evaluation.

The dissemination/ exploitation strategy focuses mainly on the learning facilitators in ACE as the short term target group. The learning facilitators are those who contribute to our project as well as those who are targeted and who benefit from the results. The project achieves this mainly through the conduction of the two waves of the Delphi study and through the conduction of national and transnational expert workshops. The workshops are another important building brick of the dissemination/ exploitation strategy. Selected stakeholders and decision makers are invited to participate in the workshops. The results of the workshops are distributed widely in the adult learning community so as to pave the way for a possible mainstreaming of the sectoral qualification frameworks in the partner countries' qualification strategies in the adult learning sector.

An additional value is added by the chosen Delphi method. The Delphi method adopted in the project includes explicitly a future-oriented dimension and is used for prognostic purposes. So the outcomes of the project will also provide a basis for policy decision making

(e.g. formulation of minimum competence standards for access to the adult learning profession).

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The partners completed the review of the existing literature on the topic and of existing competence profile descriptions in the partner countries. An intensive discussion process took place at the first partner meeting and via email in the following period which resulted in the questionnaire for the first wave of the Delphi survey. The discussion process took longer than initially expected but was helpful and needed to successfully integrate the different perspectives and key aspects in every partner country into the joint research tool.

The identification of suitable experts was another milestone in the preparation of the first wave of the survey. Each partner recruited a group of approx. 20-40 experts, consisting mainly of experienced and well-qualified practitioners with an additional smaller number of other types of experts (e.g. policy makers, managers)

The first wave was conducted and led to a first proposal of who a transnational catalogue of core competences of Adult Learning Facilitators in Europe might look like.

The competence domains that feature prominently in this (draft) catalogue include in particular:

- Group management and communication
- Efficient teaching
- Personal professional development (and reflection)
- Learning process support
- Learning process analyses
- Subject knowledge and didactical competence
- Learner oriented needs/aspects
- Learner supporting aspects
- context related aspects
- Create safe learning atmosphere (not intimidating)
- personal attributes.

The results of the first wave will now be translated into a redesigned questionnaire for the second wave in order to validate the results and come to a final agreed transnational catalogue of core competencies.

Awareness in the field of the QF2TEACH project was another outcome of the first project year. Apart from a range of publications and presentations of the project the activities conducted by each partner to recruit the expert sample contributed much to make the project known in the field and to raise interest in its final outcomes.

A project website will be online in November 2010.

4. Partnerships

Since the aim of the project is to produce a transnational (European) qualification framework for Adult Learning Facilitators, this task could, by definition, hardly be achieved by a purely national project. The intensive discussion process on the design of the Delphi questionnaire (cf. section 3) showed very clearly the complexity of the task to integrate different national traditions and perspectives, and the expertise provided by the individual project partners would not be easily found in a single national consortium. The foci set by the individual partners on particular competences and competence domains differed indeed quite a lot during the discussion. All the more it will be interesting and relevant to see what will be the common core, that in the end will be agreed and endorsed by all partners.

The broad geographical coverages – EU partners come from Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden and the UK makes sure that different “models” of adult education are covered in the project. Through the additional inclusion of Switzerland as an associate partner we have also an additional view from a non-EU-European country included. We trust, this will considerably enhance the validity and usability of the final project outcomes,

An important aspect in the project is active involvement of the group to which the final outcome of the project – the qualification framework(s) for adult learning facilitators refers. We consider that they have a particular important stake in defining what are the core competencies needed for their professional activity and how a relevant qualification framework should look like. Therefore experienced adult learning facilitators form a large part of the expert group which is surveyed during the Delphi study, and they will also be among the participants in the expert workshops where it will be decided how the final qualification framework(s) will look like.

5. Plans for the Future

The consortium is now constructing the questionnaire for the second wave of the Delphi study according to the results of the first wave. The results of the first wave show considerable consensus between outcomes of the different countries concerning a number of competencies. Therefore the intention of the second wave is to focus on these striking similarities within the findings in order to generate a transnational catalogue for Learning Facilitators in ACE. The first impression of this catalogue which will be further developed and validated in the second wave of the Delphi study consists of the following competence domains:

- Group management and communication
- Efficient teaching
- Personal professional development (and reflection)
- Learning process support
- Learning process analyses
- Subject knowledge and didactical competence
- Learner oriented needs/aspects
- Learner supporting aspects
- context related aspects
- Create safe learning atmosphere (not intimidating)
- personal attributes.

The further developed form of this catalogue will be the basis for the construction of national concepts and a transnational concept for qualification frameworks. We will proceed as following:

- One national workshop per country will be held (with the exception of the UK where a kind of sectoral qualification framework exists already) in order to construct national sectoral Qualification Frameworks for teachers in ACE on the basis of the Delphi study.
- A didactical concept for a workshop where a transnational Qualification Framework linked to the EQF should be developed will be constructed (already under construction).
- One transnational expert sample from the different national samples of the Delphi study will be built. The Expert sample will construct a transnational Qualification Framework linked to the EQF in close collaboration with the consortium.
- The expert sample will be provided with the results of the Delphi study and with the central aim and the agenda of the workshop.
- The existing approaches to describe and structure competencies for Learning Facilitators in ACE which have already been reviewed in the starting phase of the project and for the design of the questionnaire, will again be used as references in the design of the draft qualification framework(s). One international Workshop will be organized in order to construct a transnational Qualification Framework for Adult Learning Facilitators linked to the EQF and in order to discuss approaches for the implementation of the the developed national and transnational Qualification Frameworks.

The final competence catalogue and the final versions of the qualification frameworks will give a particular impetus to the dissemination and exploitation activities in the final phase of the project. Dissemination activities have started at a very early stage in the project, but obviously, had to concentrate on the project idea and concept rather than on final results. In the first phase of the project we had a dissemination strategy, which was mainly focussing on the learning facilitators in ACE as the short term target group. The learning facilitators are those who contribute to our project as well as those who are targeted and who benefit from the results. These stakeholders have been reached through their involvement as

participants in the first wave of our Delphi study. This way of addressing the learning facilitators as stakeholders will be continued and intensified through the conduction of the second wave. Another important building brick of the exploitation will be the national and transnational expert workshops will. Stakeholders and decision makers will be invited to the workshops as well and/or be informed about the workshop outcomes, thus paving the way for a possible mainstreaming of the sectoral qualification frameworks in the partner countries' qualification strategies in the adult learning sector.

Furthermore all partners will use their excellent dissemination channels – all partners are highly networked at national as well as European level and have their own institutional publications, for example - like already done in the first phase of the project in order to disseminate and exploit the project for different target groups and stakeholders.

Ongoing project activities until the end of the project include the general project management and the project evaluation which is conducted both as an internal and an external formative evaluation.

The created project website will be online in November 2010.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The main overarching EU policy objectives to which the project contributes include:

- the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practice in the field, and
- the realisation of a European Area of Lifelong Learning.

In particular the project contributes to the Action Plan on Adult Learning (2007), notably to those aspects that refer to professional staffing and competence development of adult learning teachers, which in turn are a pre-condition for improving the quality of provision in the adult learning sector.

By incorporating a scientifically derived catalogue of core competencies and the resulting qualification frameworks into the national and international lifelong learning policy debates the project will contribute to raise the societal prestige of adult learning facilitators who are key persons in the realisation of any lifelong strategy.

As stated above, the final competence catalogue and qualification frameworks will provide important European reference tools for

- developing competence development strategies and training programmes for adult learning facilitators;
- comparing existing competence levels and qualifications of adult learning facilitators throughout Europe, thus facilitating transparency and cross-border mobility of the adult learning facilitators;
- raising the visibility and profile of the adult learning sector which so far has been the most neglected compared to other education and training sectors, even though adult learning constitutes the element of lifelong learning with the longest duration (cf. Background document for the Grundtvig 10th Anniversary Conference, September 2010).

The outcomes of the project will also provide a basis for policy decision making (e.g. formulation of minimum competence standards for access to the adult learning profession), since the Delphi method adopted in the project includes explicitly a future-oriented dimension and is used for prognostic purposes. So our empirical research, which is currently ongoing, is expected to create solid results even concerning future developments of core competence requirements for adult learning facilitators.

At this stage in the project these final results have obviously not been completed, but the basis to reach them has been laid successfully. The project itself has raised interest in the field and stimulated discussion among experts even beyond Europe (Asian partners countries of the Research Network „Professionalization of Lifelong Learning with a special emphasis on teacher training” within the Asia-Europe Meeting Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub) are interested in adopting the project in their respective countries).

