



Establishing a Network for the Educational Fashion Line of Business to
Improve the European Cooperation and Enhance Mobility

STRATEGIC NETWORK PLAN
WP 2

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This network dossier is the result 3 of the project and part of work package 2: Designing the **EUrFASHION** network.

The main objective of this work package is to establish a new network for the fashion and textile sector thus improving the European cooperation and enhancing students' and professionals' mobility in this sector.

In order to ensure the sustainability and the efficient management of the network, partners have jointly elaborated a written network dossier, where the essential conditions have been determined. These conditions are described in the strategic network plan which outlines the core concepts, values and inspiring principles of the network, as well as its main objectives, goals and main activities to be performed either by the network as a whole or by individual members acting multilaterally, bilaterally or individually. Suggestions on the network governance structure and on administrative and financial mechanisms and resources required for an efficient and sustainable functioning, are also provided.

Furthermore, the **EUrFASHION** network strategy plan sets forth minimum quality standards for all members of the network to provide good quality mobility experience. Basic quality criteria targeting hosting companies will also be defined to provide a safe and career-oriented training context. A *Membership Agreement* setting forth the general terms and conditions of the cooperation among all partners in all aspects of establishing a reliable and sustainable network will be drafted as a simple, but not legally binding document and this will form an integral part of the network strategy as a common basis for mutual trust and benefit. Furthermore, a *Certificate of Membership* will also be available for 'new' members.

The strategic network plan is conceived through questionnaires delivered to all partners to collect information and suggestions. All project partners are involved in this work package with regard to their organisational background and context of networking strategies.

Main topics of the questionnaire are 1) determining the strategy of the network; 2) determining the objectives of the network.

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1. Introduction



Networks are usually informal linkages between people and institutions that have a common interest in working together and seeing some benefits emerging. A network can be defined as a group of actors or members (individuals or institutions) who contribute resources or time, in a two-way exchange or communication, interacting to achieve common objectives.

Therefore, reasons to establish a network have to be considered from the view of the members, as well as from the external environment. Any one benefit may be enough to make a network effective, and as long as the benefits are being gained, the network will remain together. As soon as benefits are not being experienced, the network will start to collapse.

The reasons for establishing the network shape the purpose and membership of the network. A clear definition and understanding of what the final goal is provides the answer to this question. Starting from an understanding of the problem situation and the definition of the vision, goal and objectives, a network may be identified as the appropriate instrument to achieve the goal. The following are drivers for establishing networks:

- ✓ understanding the problem situation, which is a basis for planning and defining activities;
- ✓ identifying the mission, objectives, principles and values to be adopted;
- ✓ the network not being the end goal, but a mechanism to deliver project objectives;
- ✓ the purpose of the network defining its geographic and subject coverage;
- ✓ open and inclusive networks making maximum use of local expertise;
- ✓ networks becoming formal when they have operational guidelines in place.

In this perspective, the development of the strategic network plan has been identified as an important mean to provide to **EURFASHION** partners a common framework:

-  promoting cohesion and a shared vision for the future;
-  moving the network forward in a common direction without losing local peculiarities;
-  recognising mutual trust and quality assurance as essential element to achieve the network's objectives.

The strategic network plan has been supported by all partners' contributions and suggestions and:

-  sets out clear priorities for the network as a whole, particularly for the project duration;
-  guides the strategic and operational plans of the network by proposing a common framework vision;
-  serves as a marketing tool to convey the network's objectives, priorities and future directions;
-  serves as a platform to continue to build the network profile and capacity;
-  serves as a basis on which the network will frame discussions and negotiations with other stakeholders at European and local level.



1.1 Background context:

future drivers and skills demand in the fashion and textile sector

The structure of the fashion and textiles sector has been impacted more than any other sector by the onset of globalisation. Globalisation, enabled by the dismantling of trade barriers, along with lower communication and transport costs, has seen lower value added manufacturing outsourced to low-cost nations.

This has transformed the way businesses operate, looking towards niche manufacturing, balanced supply sourcing or outsourcing operations in order to gain competitiveness within the global market place.

Key drivers of skills demand in this context are:

- ✓ the growth of fast fashion and technical markets
- ✓ adaptation to changing technology
- ✓ the impact of migration
- ✓ the image of the sector
- ✓ the sustainability agenda

The skills implications of the above drivers include:

- ✓ a reliance on design creativity, allied to strong technical and commercial awareness
- ✓ successful branding and marketing skills
- ✓ the development of new technologies
- ✓ the ability to compete in premium and niche markets on a global level by maintaining craft skills
- ✓ maintaining the current trajectory of business start-ups by ensuring owner-managers have the correct skills available
- ✓ ensuring EU firms have the ability to manage overseas supply chains and understand the product environment
- ✓ the maximisation of production efficiencies enabling firms to reduce costs through multi-skilling
- ✓ attracting a greater number of graduates into the sector (this is a key problem where strong leadership is needed in times of rapid change)
- ✓ due to the long-term decline in apprenticeships and other development mechanisms, along with the negative image of the sector, the ageing workforce is going to be a key problem

Life-long learning represents an important means of satisfying the need for skills in the workplace. When they recruit, enterprises may advertise for qualified and highly qualified staff having recently left the education system or coming from other companies, but they are also focusing on fostering skills within the business, seeking to capitalise on in-house expertise and versatility.

Governments, enterprises, national education systems, institutions and key European, national and regional organisations have signed agreements and set up frameworks in the areas of innovation, competitiveness and the acquisition of new core skills. These bring together inter-personal skills (greater responsiveness, relationship skills, negotiating skills)



and more concrete skills (styling, management, sales, quality control, production, marketing).

Schools, universities and training centres must respond to the needs of enterprises in terms of employee profiles and skills by offering work placements and more practical and operational training: work placements, blue-collar internships, practical courses on modern materials, use of new technologies, systematic approach to different roles, learning useful languages, teamwork, project management, familiarity with international and market practices, etc.

Therefore, there is an urgent need also in the fashion and textile sector to strengthen policies to make EU companies ready for this competition and to give young Europeans opportunities to learn and to develop their capacities. There is a need to improve mobility both in quantity and quality at the EU level, and consequently a strong concern on the part of public and private institutions to reach this goal.

Despite persistent efforts, some main barriers must be addressed if learning mobility is to be extended:

- 🇪🇺 opportunities for organised learning mobility are too few and too little is known by the majority of young people and lack of awareness of the advantages of having a mobility experience;
- 🇪🇺 teachers and trainers who could act as promoters of mobility lack both the knowledge and incentives to do so;
- 🇪🇺 complex and off-putting administrative procedures deter administrators and institutions;
- 🇪🇺 lack of knowledge about the language and culture of other countries;
- 🇪🇺 financial costs barriers as well as the lack of a coherent quality system for mobility establishing quality criteria, creating an awareness of quality among stakeholders and applying operational version of quality criteria to individual mobility projects.

Furthermore, the issue of recognition and certification for learning mobility is vital – a significant number of mobile learners still do not receive appropriate recognition.

2. Establishing the EURFASHION network



2.1 Guiding principles and main objectives

The EURFASHION approach to establishing the network is based upon some guiding principles. Each guiding principle is supported by the goals and objectives of establishing a sustainable network based on:

- Two common reference profiles in the fashion and textile sectors set up as part of the EURFASHION project. Such common references describe units of learning outcomes that form a common "interpretive framework" used to establish coherency between qualifications in each country. They encourage qualification transparency and the recognition of mobility in companies and training centres.
- Mutual trust where members can share an ECVET-oriented process in organising and managing mobility experiences.
- A step-by-step quality approach for the whole mobility process (before, during and after based on feedback gathered systematically from the different players involved in each mobility operation).

Two European shared reference profiles



The EURFASHION network will therefore offer a 'safe' ground for experimentation with high-quality students' mobility in the fashion and textile sector by making use of the European reference profiles. Furthermore, it will strengthen capacity building (sharing expertise and building together a European dimension of the sector) and improve the image of the sector for young people to make VET more attractive.

The EURFASHION network will pursue the following main objectives by providing its members (training centres, companies and sectoral organisations) with:

- facilitated mobility opportunities for learners through privileged partnerships;
- accredited host training centres from member of the network;
- partner companies ready to welcome trainees in work placement pre-selected by member training centres and accredited by the EURFASHION Board of Members;
- quality criteria for host companies and training centres to ensure mobility operations;
- a process of monitoring and recognition of mobility operations;
- a website dedicated to the network, offering a public part to promote the network and a private section reserved for its members;

-  facilities to find partners, through a reliable database of companies and training centres managed and updated continuously;
-  assessments of joint mobility operations by the various actors in the network (training centres, companies, learners);
-  supporting tools for learners on intercultural preparation (Independent Learning Workbook “International Orientation and Preparation – Europe is in your hands”);

2.2 Added value of the network

Benefits are key for the network to stay together. They maintain commitment and are the ultimate objective for members.

Benefits to members

-  Linkage and exchange with peers
-  Establishing partnerships
-  Access to new information, materials and experience (know-how)
-  Context understanding: needs assessment, opportunity assessments, stakeholders’ maps
-  Financial gain: polling of resources
-  Access to more work opportunities
-  Earning influence and prominence
-  Practical support to capacity development delivery
-  Knowledge management and creation: formation of multidisciplinary teams and approaches
-  Strengthened capacities: shared lessons and benchmarking
-  Access to social networks and Communities of Practice

Benefits to new members

-  To develop trust-based relationships/interactions with peer institutions
-  High quality professional support for the members of the network – Peer learning (schools, teachers, VET providers and companies) to learn from other experiences and practices – knowledge transfer
-  An improved information and knowledge base for decision-making
-  Increased attention for certain topics in the policy agenda
-  Strengthened stakeholders: users and policy implementers

Benefits to companies

-  Connections with schools/training centres abroad
-  Connections with other companies abroad that could act as producers or as agents
-  Exposing the company to a different (business) culture by hosting foreign students
-  On the long term: strengthening the fashion and textile industry by organising a greater flow of information between European countries



2.3 Strategic position of the EUrFASHION network

In its development phase, the EUrFASHION network needs to clearly determine the type of activity it will engage in and how it will fit into the existing framework of interests. This is a strategic decision, which may affect its future success and how it will be perceived.

Some key points that need to be considered:

1. The network should not compete with its members and should look for complementarity, building on the strengths of the members.
2. Networks can bring benefits of scale, knowledge and skills together for sharing facilitating activities that may not be feasible for individual members.
3. The network can provide a focal point for exchange with the international community accessing international knowledge and resources.
4. An open network allows a member to join and also to leave when it considers that appropriate.
5. Open and inclusive networks enhance commitment, local ownership and leadership through participation and decentralisation.

Two key areas need to be considered:

 **Membership strengthening.** Attract new members. What benefits can be brought to potential members in terms of information, exchange, opportunities and development of skills.

 **Network management.** How will the network be managed and administered? Where will it be located and how will it recruit and communicate with members? Where will it get the operational funds? What will be the operational guidelines to be followed?

3. EURFASHION network operational methodology

3.1 Legal and institutional framework and governance structure

Legal and institutional framework

It may not be necessary or desirable to establish the network as a legal entity. Giving the network a legal status can make it rigid and reduce its capacity to adapt to changes. It also has costs and responsibilities which need specific management.

Certainly, this decision is not advisable at the beginning and should be deferred until the network and its members have enough experience to make an informed decision about the most appropriate legal and institutional status.

As much as it is true that funding is only provided to legally registered organisations, it is also true that networks may perfectly operate under a host agreement. A good agreement with a host institution will provide what is needed in terms of legal representation and contract signing.

Members' commitment to networking is required for sustainability and impact. This cannot be granted through a legal agreement. Getting a legal status will not magically solve key issues like the activity level of members.

Governance structure

An effective collaborative culture involving all members will be necessary to ensure the fine-tuning of the network activities and responsiveness to issues which should be addressed in the context of the implementation of mobility experiences.

The governance structure proposed for the EURFASHION network is guided by the principles of inclusiveness and efficiency, with a view to reflecting the heterogeneity of VET systems, geographical diversity and the need for a broadly-based ownership of its work without forgetting an effective management of resources and inputs. The EURFASHION network structure will therefore be designed to maintain multi-stakeholder representation (schools/VET providers, companies, professional and sectoral organisation and competent authorities).

The proposed governance architecture could be composed by the following governance bodies each playing a leading role in developing the network framework and implementing its mission:

Steering Committee composed by representatives of core partners, active members, giving strategic guidance, determining the policy of the network and taking all decisions concerning its organisation, activities and implementation programmes;

Board of Members responsible for implementing the network's mission and deciding on the admission of new members (compliance with quality criteria). The Board of Members should, therefore, ensure, an efficient day-to-day management of the network by:

-  making sure that the members are constantly updated on the activities and objectives of the network;
-  assuring the flow of communication and information by organizing periodic meetings and via dedicated mailing;

-  assuring the periodical monitoring and evaluation of the network progress status and the quality control of its results;
-  guaranteeing the correct administrative functioning of the network, gathering and organizing all the relevant administrative documents;
-  ensuring public visibility of the network and its activities;
-  involving relevant stakeholders in the network to maximize the social, institutional, scientific and economic benefits and minimize its negative impacts.

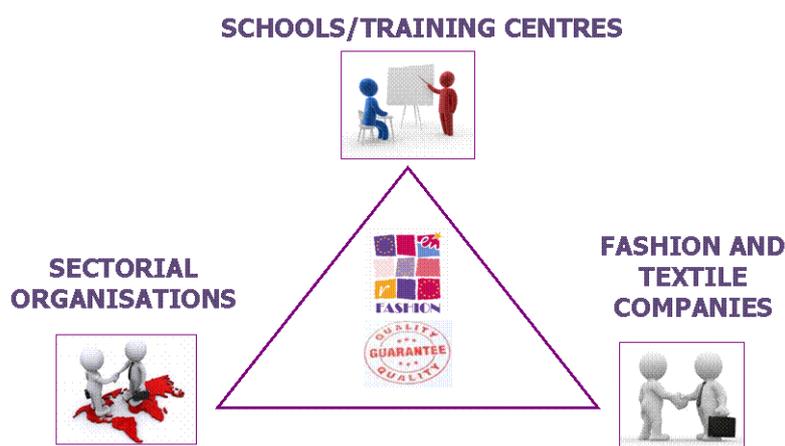
The Board of Members should be composed of a small group of leading members i.e. max. 5 representatives rotating among the partners. Too many members will be bureaucratically heavy and will not allow to reach the network's main achievements. All members should meet once or twice a year and receive proposals from the Board of Members.

3.2 Membership Agreement

The success of any network depends upon commitment and interest of members. It should be clear at all times that the network is there for the members and not the other way around. The network is, on a first level, functional to its membership.

When deciding on who can be a member, several considerations must be made in order to provide a membership suitable for the network purpose. Selection criteria should bring in the right kind of members to achieve the goals and objectives of the network. It is important to do this at an early stage so that the right target group can be involved from the outset:

The proposed membership structure for the **EURFASHION** network is characterised by a 'triangular' alliance composed by:



Three categories of members could be distinguished:

-  **Members** are actively involved in the network, and take part at meetings and conferences. They can also be part of the Steering Committee and be elected for the Board of Members
-  **Associated members** have a supportive role in the network
-  **Ambassadors** have a promoting role in the network



The membership should be formalized by the Board of Members assessing new members' capability to manage mobility operations in full compliance with the network's quality process.

Members could be publically announced by the establishment of a legal structure and, initially, via the network website dedicated to mobility with a public space that presents the network and its tools and a private space that allows members to communicate, organize mobility operations, enhance their experiences and evaluate the network and its quality process.

A **Membership Agreement** should set forth the general terms and conditions of the cooperation between partners in all aspects of establishing a sustainable network achieving jointly agreed objectives. It should formalise the membership by stating the mutual acceptance of the status and procedures of members involved and established procedures for cooperation. By signing it, they should declare to comply with the quality criteria, provide information about assessment methods and procedures and certify the agreement of the competent institutions to the members of the network. Members should agree to check the comparability of learning outcomes, related to the shared reference profiles and their national qualifications. Members should also identify other interested actors and competent institutions that may be involved in the process concerned and their functions.

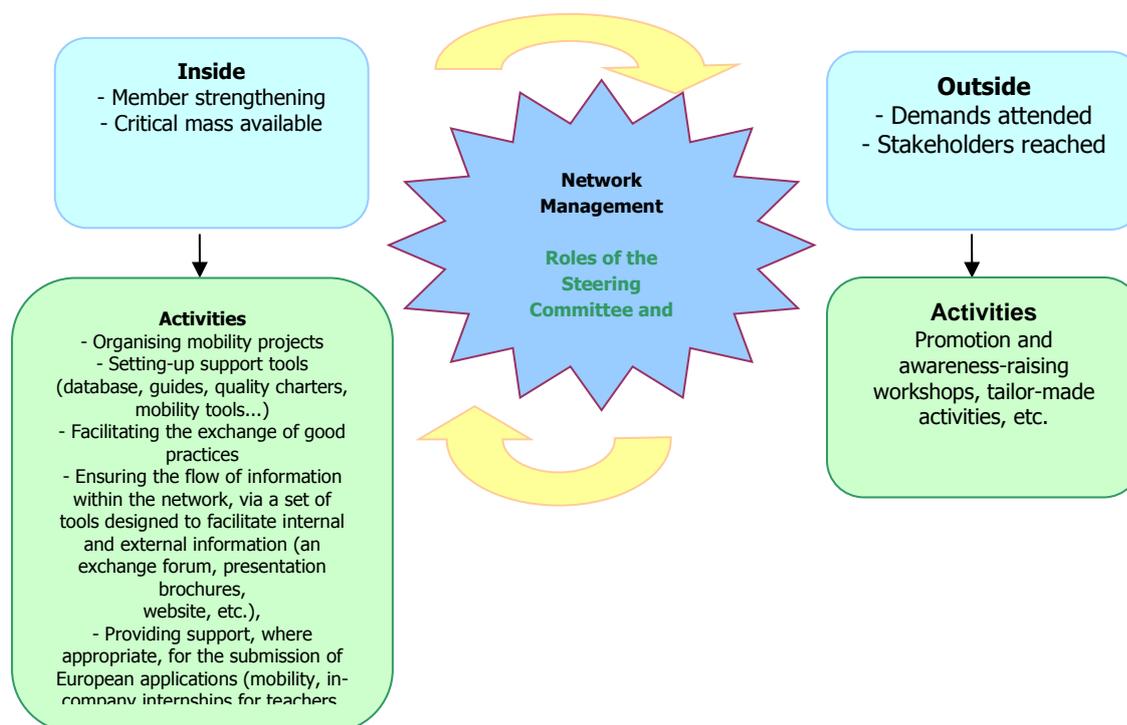
The Membership Agreement has to be simple, concise and not legally binding document. It must be intended as mutual useful cooperative agreement (see Annex).

Additionally also a **Certificate of Membership** is developed to officially declare that an organisation is a member or an associated member of the network. This certificate serves for members to show their professional pride and demonstrate their commitment. The certificate can be framed and handed out to the members (see Annex).

3.3 Working areas

Attention should be focused on two directions, namely the inside and the outside of the network, keeping network management as a facilitation bond between these two.

- **Inside:** How will the network be managed and administrated? Where will it get operational funds? Inside management is an input to provide benefits to members and an input for work planning towards new activities.
- **Outside / Delivering capacity development:** It is about responding to demands of the main network's target groups. This requires work planning, proposal preparation, fundraising, understanding the context (needs assessment and knowledge management) and building teams.



3.4 Quality criteria

Minimum quality standards should be defined for all members of the network (both schools/VET providers and companies).

More specifically, for schools/VET providers members of the network, basic quality criteria should be defined to provide a good quality of mobility experience (shared references on qualification and training, transparency regarding the organisation of the training process, programme, and assessment procedures, pedagogical resources for students/trainees, capability to involve quality work placement companies, availability to give advice/guidance during the mobility experience, etc.)..

For companies who are members of the network, basic quality criteria should be defined to provide a safe and career-oriented training context, taking in consideration the student/trainees' level and qualification profile, support/guidance by identifying a company's mentor to train and coach the student/trainee during the work placement, to monitor and assess the student/trainee performances in cooperation with the training centre, etc..

Some of the proposed quality criteria could be:

- 🇪🇺 The student should be well supported when going abroad.
- 🇪🇺 Host companies should be confident that legal requirements are met and that the receiving educational institution and the sending educational institution have made good arrangements to support the student;
- 🇪🇺 Host companies should be confident that they are given clear instructions what steps to take to ensure the student the right learning experience coherent with his/her curriculum;
- 🇪🇺 Host companies should be confident that the student complies with the minimum quality standards that they have set including language skills, specific (technical) knowledge and the capability to adapt to new situations.

Companies should be given a clear set of standards to adhere by, including the minimum amount of time available to support the student, language skills and a clear program for the student to follow.

A constant quality process taking evaluation of each mobility experience should also be taken into account to maintain the quality of the network and ensure transparency and respect for the principles of the network.

4. EURFASHION dissemination and communication strategy



An appropriate dissemination and a clear communication strategy are central components for the success of the network. Therefore the efficient dissemination of the results of the various initiatives and other useful material via the website and other media will be important in maximising the engagement and involvement of key national and European stakeholders at every level.

The network should develop a dissemination/communication strategy to be reviewed on an annual basis. It will identify the target audiences and their particular informational needs. The strategy should establish the most appropriate communication channels or the products which will best capture and deliver the information, messages and added value knowledge emerging from the work of the network as a community of practice.

By identifying the target audiences, the products that best match their needs and the mechanisms to provide feedback, the network will effectively deliver the findings, added value knowledge and/or messages. This process will ensure that:

-  the added value of results becomes sustainable, serve as a model, and their impact in the field of mobility in VET is extended at both national and European level by focusing on 'direct beneficiaries' (i.e. VET providers, learners, teachers) and members.
-  the added value results and the participatory development, will be better understood, adopted in national projects and adapted to their needs by the decision makers.

Collaboration among members should be central to the operational methodology of the network. A sustainable and collaborative platform should be necessary in order to have a well functioning community of practice, and capitalise the results emerging from the various network's activities and processes.

A dedicated website should provide the basis for developing this community of practice and interrelated users (an on-line collaboration platform). It should be essential that the Network, through the web, builds a content-credible approach by developing content relevant information and knowledge in an attractive and user-friendly format.

The Network website should become the focal point of provision of information and involvement of members, participants and relevant stakeholders, creating a dynamic content web for members and users:

It should be advisable to develop an RSS system to distribute content to the Network target audiences. The RSS system should enable the Network to quickly send information and updates to members and other key audiences/stakeholders, engaging them in the process. The RSS system should be the channel used to reach and communicate with members and other users -by automatic subscription (e.g. to the on-line network).

The work of the Network should be structured around various meetings: working groups, on-line meetings, seminars, experts strategy meetings, etc. representing, in conjunction with the on-line communication, an opportunity for members and key stakeholders to engage discussions which are an essential contribution to building strong working relationships, transparency and mutual trust.

5. EUrFASHION network enlargement and sustainability



Three possible scenarios can be envisaged concerning the sustainability of the **EUrFASHION** network:

- I. At the end of the project **EUrFASHION**, the network could continue as a self-controlling network delivering services as part of the already existing offers of members' organizations. In particular the following activities could be delivered:
 - a. first assistance, information and guidance to interested students/companies;
 - b. proactive promotion of initiatives and programmes;
 - c. provision to the main stakeholders of an up-to-date overview of international mobility policies, programmes, initiatives and of their development in the local context;
 - d. support and continuity to networking contacts through regular dialogue and exchange of information;
 - e. possible contacts with other existing local networks for network enlargement and web tool update.

- II. At the end of the project **EUrFASHION** network members could sustain the foreseen activities and services through support from regional financing programmes, European funded initiatives with specific reference to the new EU-funded programme Erasmus+ 2014-2020. Other non-financial incentives could be proposed to policy makers at regional and national level, including fiscal incentives for investment in training courses, mobility schemes or other initiatives.

- III. At the end of the project **EUrFASHION** network members could have a market-oriented approach by promoting the foreseen activities among potentially interested private sponsors, or by considering the opportunity to introduce a registration fee to members (VET providers, umbrella organisations, companies, etc.) in order to guarantee the delivery of services on a permanent base.

The financial sustainability will be mostly discussed during the project implementation, especially in the occasions of the meetings where members will have the opportunity to exchange ideas and make proposals. At the end of the project, partner organizations will continue to cultivate Networking relationships thus building a long term cooperation among them which could also become a point of reference for students and companies willing to receive information and reliable contacts on the European mobility schemes.



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