

# **Report on the impact of universities as partners in Grundvig Projects, and the impact on the universities**

## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A survey was sent out to people in universities involved in Grundvig-funded projects, enquiring into their experiences. Replies were received, mostly from project co-ordinators. The responses may not be typical of Grundvig projects; for example they may relate to more enthusiastic respondents or to more successful projects.

Frequently-mentioned objectives for institutions' involvement were to increase their knowledge or expertise, and to develop contacts. Most respondents felt strongly that their objectives had been met. Whilst respondents also tended to feel that objectives for the wider community had been met, they expressed this less strongly. Participants rated the quality of their projects highly; however assessment of their impact was more mixed. Respondents appeared keen to share lessons learnt and good practice. A commonly made comment was that projects needed partners to work together and to co-operate; this appeared to relate especially to planning.

According to the respondents, the projects would not have happened without EU funding and were well justified. In general, they thought that follow-on work would be useful.

The lessons learned identified here represent in microcosm the lessons of both Grundvig projects specifically and the whole of the European Union Education and Training / Life Long Learning project portfolio more widely. It is important to create an environment in which processes of university institutional learning and good practice in this regard are encouraged. Some European bidding processes strongly discourage such open lesson learning; the interests of universities are not seen to be served by admitting to failure. Consequently, institutions do not develop an ethos of learning from both failure and success. The need for a strategic perspective was recognised implicitly firstly by the creation of the EQUIPE Plus Management Team, who, in turn, gave me the opportunity to canvas and interview university partners without severe restrictions. This was attempted with sensitivity in order to glean honest responses.

### ***Key Results 1: How do Universities Contribute to Grundtvig?***

Universities bring significant strengths to Grundtvig projects. These include: scientific rigour, quality standards, status, perspective, methodology, and expertise, project management skills, logistical skills and professional financial administration. Importantly they also provide a gateway to other relevant knowledge and competencies as well as wide ranging and relevant networks.

## ***Key Results 2: How does Grundtvig Impact on Universities?***

In general, Grundtvig has a positive impact on universities. In particular, Grundtvig acts as a staff development tool and generates new skills, knowledge and personal growth in the staff who participate directly. At institutional level, Grundtvig brings meaningful networking with both familiar and trusted partners as well beyond through the development of new relationships. It also brings social awareness and a fresh perspective (at European level) beyond the mainstream undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. The Grundtvig funding mechanisms also encourage efficiency, effectiveness and lean management practice, and the final project outputs provide new teaching and learning tools and materials.

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

**2.1** EQUIPE Plus is a project under the EU-funded Grundtvig programme. Part of its remit is to examine the impact that the Grundtvig programme has had. This relates both to the impact the involvement has had on the university and the impact the university had on the project. The survey and follow-up reported on here are elements of that examination.

**2.2** In the period 2002-5, universities were involved in approximately 22% of Grundtvig projects. However, a survey of the scale, scope and quality of their involvement has never been undertaken, nor has there been a serious examination of the impact of university involvement on projects. There is also a lack of evidence about the impact of Grundtvig projects on life-long learning (LLL) in participating universities.

**2.3** As a university based network, EQUIPE Plus has been well placed to investigate these issues. It has surveyed the universities involved in Grundtvig during the period 2002 to 2005 – both those acting as main players in Grundtvig projects (contractors or coordinators) as well as those making more specialised contributions as partners.

## **3 METHOD**

### **3.1 Methodology**

The survey was undertaken in 3 phases. Phase 1 involved identifying target institutions from the European Commission's Compendium of Grundtvig projects and the development of a written questionnaire. The questionnaire gathered basic factual information about the project itself and the make-up of the project partnership and also asked respondents to make professional judgments about the qualitative impact of the project. Phase 2 involved the distribution of the questionnaire. The information gleaned from the questionnaire was used as the basis for the follow up phase 3 which comprised interviews with representatives of universities involved in Grundtvig projects.

Face to face interviews with University representatives at EUCEN conferences in Paris, Ljubljana, Hannover and Edinburgh supplemented this process and ensured a good

geographical coverage of the EU. In addition, an intensive one-day Peer-to-Peer Quality Review (PPQR) explored in depth the Grundtvig experiences of 3 Universities. *An example of the London PPQR result is included here as Appendix A, and includes the useful model developed by Robert Stake.*

## **Questionnaire design**

Decision on what to include:

- A long list of possible questions was produced:
  - open-ended questions
  - questions for respondents to say to what extent they agreed (rate 1-7; e.g. “It will be helpful to people without basic skills”)
  - demographic information (e.g. list of partners involved in the project and their categorisation)
- The list of questions was reduced by discussion.

Broadly speaking, the final list:

- retained open-ended questions
  - included a reduced list of questions which recipients were asked to rate, focussing on impact of the project and (for example) removing those relating to project management
  - pre-filled demographic information as far as possible.
- Respondents were asked to categorise the type of institutions involved ‘if they readily can’

## **Choice of projects/contacts**

1. Compendia were read to provide sample projects where the coordinator, or any partner, was a EUCEN member.
2. This list was marked up to show institutional contacts where possible:
  - a. where the institution was the co-ordinator, the contact name is included in the Grundtvig compendium
  - b. where the institution was a partner but not a co-ordinator, in some cases we were able to provide a contact in the institution
3. From the list, we selected projects
  - a. which should have recently finished, or were about to finish (based on our interpretation of dates and project length in the compendia)
  - b. but avoiding asking any one institution about more than one project
4. Project was added to the list (serial no 57: Agade. ).
5. 5/9/06: Sent questionnaire to 16 people at 12 institutions regarding 11 projects. (of the institutions, 7 were co-ordinators, 5 were partners)
6. 18/10/06 Chase-up sent with further information about our interest.

The following table gives further details of the sampling.

<b>Grundvig compdm</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Sampling</b>	<b>No of projects in long list</b>	<b>No of projects for which survey sent; no of institutions surveyed; no of people surveyed</b>
1/4	2003	Whole compendium <i>(checked)</i>	9	3; 3; 3
1/4	2004	Whole compendium <i>(checked)</i>	15	5; 6; 8
1/4	2005	Whole compendium	13	
2	2003	Sampled every 5 pages, starting with p.10 (pdf numbering) or the next page that started a project	6	2; 2; 3
2	2005	First 75 pages	4	1; 1; 2
<b>Total</b>			<b>47</b>	<b>11; 12; 16</b>

**Next stage** Approached selected EQUIPE Plus/EUCEN contacts in 6 selected countries

1 Previous guidance from group

- 1<sup>st</sup> level: approach lead partners/partners who are involved in Eucen (as sampled 5/9/06)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> level: lead partners, from compendia
- 3<sup>rd</sup> level: additional interviews to cross check data

2 Searched the compendia for more projects involving university and also Eucen partners

- tracked down contacts;

and noting that the proportion of projects which have recently finished or are about to finish, may be lower than those in the compendia which have already been targeted.

### **3.2 Participants**

Respondents were recruited in two different ways. Firstly, questionnaires were sent to individuals about specific Grundvig projects. These projects were selected from Grundvig compendia on the basis and a number of EUCEN member institutions were listed as being involved. Institutions were only included if the compendium provided named contacts (i.e. the EUCEN member was the project co-ordinator) or if the task leader knew a named contact. Projects were only included if it appeared that they were due to have finished, based on the compendium date and the length of the project. EQUIPE Plus questionnaires are additional to this report, which focuses on the targeted questionnaires were sent to institutions regarding a range of Grundvig projects. A total of forty two individuals responded in complete detail and they represent some 14 EU

countries. Follow up interviews proved to be helpful to check the data and meaning of written comments. To ensure comprehensiveness, some contacts in certain countries were doggedly sought.

Questionnaires were handed out at a EUCEN workshop for EQUIPE Plus on 17 November 2006. In addition to the written questionnaires that were returned, all completed that day, a number of qualitative interviews were conducted and these were illuminating. For example, one was from a project co-ordinator, and two were from institutions that were not listed in the compendium as originally having been involved at all in the project (presumably they had subsequently become partners). One of these latter respondents gave responses which combined two projects, one of which was not part of the Grundvig programme but was funded by the Joint Action Programme of DGEAC, the European Commission. One project was covered by two of these respondents.

A further sampling was planned and held, based on the successful Paris model, using questionnaires and face to face interviews and follow-up data gathering. This occurred at the Hanover EUCEN conference in November 2007. Many of the organizations were universities, but one was a commercial organization acting as project co-ordinator. About half of the responses related to projects under Grundvig 1/4 (four projects, in compendia ranging from 2000 to 2004) and the other half to projects under Grundvig 2 (in compendia for 2002 and 2003). Projects varied in length from one to three years.

### **3.3 Questionnaire**

A purpose-written questionnaire was used. Most responses were on Likert scales (with responses on a scale of 1 to 7) or other closed formats. However, respondents were asked to state the aims of the project, and were able to elaborate on other answers in open formats where appropriate. Finally, respondents were asked to write any comments they had on the project or on the Grundvig initiative generally.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 General**

Clearly, the respondents did not represent a random sample of projects or of people involved with them. In particular, it is likely that responses will have come from enthusiastic individuals, in relation to successful projects, or both. Additionally the sample size means that caution should be exercised in interpreting the results.

All of the projects were complete, or were expected to complete on time, except one. This latter was subject to an “amendment in the eligibility period”.

## **4.2 Institutions involved**

All of the projects considered involved universities. Some also involved other higher education institutions. Four involved other kinds of institutions which teach school leavers. Three involved schools, community centres, other institutions aimed at “second chance education” and government (by and large, if projects involved one of these types of organisation they involved all of them). Three involved a neighbourhood organisation and one a hospital. Some of the projects involved a trade union, library, museum or other cultural body, a body involved in the education of senior citizens, a sports association or a prison. Several involved other kinds of non-commercial organisations, and one involved a commercial organisation (the project co-ordinator).

## **4.3 Aims of the projects**

Asked what the respondents as institutions had expected to get from the project, the most common responses were in the general areas of increasing their expertise, experience, and information; developing contacts or partnerships; or some combination of these. Examples included involvement in a new area of education, new methodologies, improving curriculum building, creating a team of trainers, and creating a partnership amongst people involved amongst the project. (Several responses mentioned more than one motivation). On how far their aims had been achieved, five gave the maximum possible rating of 7, and the other two gave ratings of 5, just above neutral. Elaborating, some institutions specifically mentioned that hard deliverables had been produced, whilst some pointed to an increase in their knowledge.

Cited aims for partners (other than the respondent’s own) and the wider community were quite similar, e.g. “to develop a network providing information” or to introduce an initiative throughout participating countries. However, respondents were less convinced that these aims had been achieved, with a median rating of 5. One of the respondents who gave low ratings drew attention to the small size of the project, and another suggested that not too much could be expected from one project. Another respondent said that they “did not identify something 100% new”.

## **4.4 Quality and impact of the project: general**

Respondents’ assessments of quality of the projects were high. In response to the question “Overall, what has been the quality of the project in terms of improving adult education/lifelong learning of a non-vocational nature?” four of the seven respondents gave the maximum possible score of 7. The lowest score was 4 (neutral). Most respondents did not elaborate on their reasons for these scores. However it should be borne in mind that most of the respondents were co-ordinators for the projects in question.

Assessment of the projects’ impact was more mixed. X number of respondents gave scores above neutral to the question “Overall, what has been the impact of the project in terms of improving adult education/lifelong learning of a non-vocational nature?”, and



- Median rating: 6. Ratings above 4: 5. Ratings below 4: 1.
- (c) *It will affect learning in countries throughout the EU*  
Median rating: 4. Ratings above 4: 2. Ratings below 4: 2. Three ratings were neutral or 'don't know'.
- (d) *It will mainly affect learning in one country*  
Median rating: 3. Ratings above 4: 2. Ratings below 4: 3. No rating was above 5. That is to say, respondents mildly disagreed with this provocative suggestion.
- (e) *It will mainly affect learning in one language*  
Median rating: 4. Ratings above 4: 1. Ratings below 4: 2. Two respondents gave ratings of 4, and two of 'don't know'.
- (f) *It will help learners develop their intercultural awareness*  
Median rating: 6. Ratings above 4: 4. Ratings below 4: 2. There was one rating of 1 (not at all true).
- (g) *It will help learners improve or update their general skills*  
Median rating: 6. Ratings above 4: 5. Ratings below 4: 1.
- (h) *It will be helpful to people who left school without formal qualifications*  
Median rating: 5. Ratings above 4: 3. Ratings below 4: 2.  
One of the respondents added that their project had trained trainers who would go on to provide training in various kinds of institution.
- (i) *It will be helpful to people without basic skills*  
Median rating: 3. Ratings above 4: 3. Ratings below 4: 4. No ratings above 5.
- (j) *It is especially relevant to parental and/or family learning*  
Median rating: 1.5. Ratings above 4: 1. Ratings below 4: 4.
- (k) *It is especially relevant to people who are disadvantaged for socio-economic reasons*  
Median rating: 3. Ratings above 4: 2. Ratings below 4: 4.
- (l) *It is especially relevant to disabled people with special educational needs*  
Median rating: 2.5. Ratings above 4: 2. Ratings below 4: 3. The ratings below 4 were all of 1 (not at all true)

#### **4.7 Funding, benefits and further work**

The respondents said that these projects would not have happened without EU funding, and that they were well justified. In general, they thought that follow-on work would be useful and that this would be pursued. Again, these results may reflect the sample (people may have been more likely to respond about good and exciting projects). Details are as follows:

- (m) *The project would not have happened without EU funding*  
Median rating: 7. All responses were 6 or 7.
- (n) *The benefits of the project justified the cost*  
Median rating: 7. All responses were 7 apart from one of 4.
- (o) *It would be helpful to do further work to follow on from this project*  
Median rating: 7. There were four responses of 7; the others were 4, 5 and 6.
- (p) *We have applied for, or will apply for, further Grundvig funding to follow on from this project*

Median rating: 6. Actually, the most common response was “Don’t know” (4 respondents)/

(q) *One or more of the partner institutions will be funding further work to follow on from this project*

Median rating: 6.5. Ratings above 4: 4. Ratings below 4: nil. Don’t know: 3.

(r) *One or more of the partner institutions will be applying for funding from elsewhere to follow on from this project*

Median rating: 7. Ratings above 4: 4. Ratings below 4: nil. Don’t know: 3.

(p, q, r): *the three questions considered together*

All of the respondents who were project co-ordinators replied that an application for funding for follow-on work would be made to at least one source (with a rating of 6 or 7, except for one respondent). The respondents who were not originally listed as being involved with their projects said that they did not know.

#### **4.8 Lessons learnt, and aspects of good practice, reported informally and anecdotally by respondents**

The networking aspect – working together is the crucial factor. The genuine commitment of all partners involved was identified as a critical success factor.

Aspects of good practice:

- Democracy and long discussion about procedures and content always necessary, also relevant for the web
- All ideas are valuable, do not leave any of these out
- Take the project as common learning process
- Keep the fun and serious work “in balance”

The common strength of successful partners was in the professionalism that all the partners showed in the project. This creates a productive and sustainable partnership for future projects, as appropriate.

A significant majority of respondents feel their University’s participation was a worthwhile activity for both their University, for the partners they collaborated with, and the wider society. There are very divergent views from those respondents who did not agree it was useful and qualitative follow-up will produce some interesting vignettes. Some respondents found opportunities to use the knowledge gleaned from their Grundvig involvement are quite limited, some universities are using Grundvig not only as a perceived ‘cash cow’ but in terms of organisational development.

While the majority feel that the move to partnership working is ‘current’ in that it reflects present and future needs, many expressed concerns about the lack of profile for Grundvig internally, within some Universities. Indeed, In this regard, LLL staff can be seen as in the vanguard of collaborative endeavours within some Universities.

A number of other themes have been raised as being important on an individual development level including: making LLL staff feel valued; personal learning and growth, which includes having access to such collaborations and learning opportunities;

recognition of skills involved in this work, which is sometimes seen as a ‘Cinderella’ area of the University; opportunities to network; having sufficient resources to achieve Grundvig objectives. The report of results will provide concrete examples related to each of these themes identified by respondents.

Access to appropriate resources to deliver results is viewed as key. Another important dimension raised is time to access the opportunities available. Other themes include the need for timely advice, support and guidance, regular feedback, inclusion and engagement. During follow-up conversations, when queried on knowledge needs, respondents indicated a strong level of comfort with their knowledge level of the values and ethics involved in Grundvig projects. The areas that were found to be most lacking in terms of knowledge were: principles of EU project reporting, EU policy development process, and knowledge of EU official languages.

The useful results from Paris and Hanover and their follow up, as well as the results of consultation with others identified as the process has unfolded. EQUIPE Partners were identified to undertake questionnaire work in the period specified for this endeavour. Each was contacted and apprised of the procedure and provided with the questionnaire. *An example from the Polish partner is included here as Appendix A.*

### **EQUIPE Plus**

Grundtvig Survey

No. days offered

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Y1</b>	<b>Y2</b>	<b>Y3</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>BU</b>	0	5	10	15
<b>DK</b>	0	0	4	4
<b>PL*</b>	0	3	3	6
<b>RO</b>	4	4	4	12
<b>LV</b>	5	5	5	15
<b>SK</b>	1	2	3	6
<b>PT</b>	5	5	5	15

Grundvig e-Flash was sent them the questionnaire for dissemination. “This is a monthly bulletin for organisations currently involved - or those who would like to be - in the Grundtvig programme. The aim is to keep you up to date with news and events in the world of Grundtvig.”

### **4.9 Other Findings**

A significant majority of respondents stated that their university’s participation was a worthwhile activity for both their university, for the partners they collaborated with, and the wider society. Many valued this involvement in terms of organisational development and a useful link with the wider external environment - including a potential mechanism to develop research links.

Grundtvig also:

- Makes ULLL staff feel valued providing personal learning and growth, which includes having access to new collaborations and learning opportunities
- Provides recognition of skills involved in ULLL work, which is sometimes seen as having low status in the university
- Provides opportunities to network
- Provides important resources to achieve objectives in line with Grundtvig values and objectives.

Problems associated with University involvement with Grundtvig were also highlighted:

- Some respondents found opportunities to use the knowledge gleaned from their Grundtvig involvement quite limited.
- Some universities are using Grundtvig only as a supplementary income stream without seeing and exploiting the wider benefits of involvement.
- Concerns were also expressed about the lack of profile for Grundtvig internally, within some universities.
- The time required for Grundtvig work is also an issue with heavy and conflicting priorities and workloads.
- Familiarity with the principles of EU project reporting, EU policy development process and EU official languages is an important asset in making a successful contribution to Grundtvig, but this knowledge is not always in place.

## **5. Concluding thoughts**

Universities make a positive impact on Grundtvig projects and benefit from their involvement. The survey has highlighted that the university sector and Grundtvig share many of the same values and ethics in relation to adult learning and this is an important feature for successful projects.

The focus of this Report was in part structured by an ambivalent relationship between lesson-learning and questionnaires that were at times seen with suspicion as an 'audit' of sorts. The universities were not being monitored in that way, but the perception remained that the results might negatively reflect on universities' reputations. After all, project monitoring and evaluation has become a common facet of work. The 'clienting of relations' brings with it a threat of curtailed budgets which creates a vested interest for all recipients of EU funds to tell a good story. In the current arrangements it is hard to admit in public to learning from failure. Even if this is rich territory to share, it is alas, all too rare.

A structural incitement to euphemism operates from the highest levels. Yet if an unbroken stream of good news rapidly begins to lose its plausibility, then an unremitting sense of critique brings with it the suspicion of hidden agendas and selective reportage. In these circumstances it is important to find avenues through which truth is told with candor, whilst retaining the discipline of effective procedures of this task for the EQUIPE Plus project. We found the interviews and face to face facilitated sessions were an

appropriate medium for such truth telling, and the constructive documenting of both failure and success.

Interventions about European universities and projects should be as much about problems identified as solutions offered. A weakness of the short term project work model for all partners was the lack of a strategic vision implicit in the output driven model of working. However, the strength of the model is in the success of these new and different partnerships as delivery agents with generic project management capacity, and learning (and continuing to learn) from each other.

The overall recommendation from this EQUIPE Plus initiative is:

**Through EU networks such as EUCEN, to promote and support the exchange of good practice, mutual learning and the development of joint projects in lifelong learning between key stakeholders in Member States.**

MCH